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# The Gendered Nature of Quaker Charity

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# The Gendered Nature of Quaker Charity

## **Abstract**

For a holistic understanding of violence, the study of its antithesis, nonviolence, is necessary. A primary example of nonviolence is charity. Not only does charity prevent violence from rogue vagrants, but it also is an act of kindness. In seventeenth-century England, when a third of the population lived below the poverty line, charity was crucial. Especially successful were Quaker charity communities and the early involvement of Quaker women in administering aid. This is remarkable, considering that most parish-appointed overseers of the poor were usually male. What explains this phenomenon that women became the main administrators of Quaker charity? Filling in this gap of knowledge would shed further light on Quaker gender dynamics and the Quaker values that are still found in American culture today.

## **Keywords**

Quakers, charity

## **Disciplines**

History of Religion

## **Comments**

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# **The Gendered Nature of Quaker Charity**

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Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Research Fellowship  
University of Pennsylvania

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Faculty Advisors: Margo Todd, Thomas Safley

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### List of Abbreviations

DMMM	Darby Men's Monthly Meeting
DWMM	Darby Women's Monthly Meeting
FHL	Friends House Library, London
LBM	London Box Meeting
LSWM	London Six Weeks Meeting
SWMM	Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting
SMMM	Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting
TNA	The National Archives of the United Kingdom
YWMM	York Women's Monthly Meeting
YMMM	York Men's Monthly Meeting

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## Introduction

“The people are in desperate condition...[they] curse the king, wish for Cromwell, and say come Dutch come devil they cannot be worse.”<sup>1</sup> As described by Samuel Pepys, a member of parliament in 1666, the poor in seventeenth century England faced great difficulties in making ends meet. Between one quarter and one third of the population was “below the status of a wage earner.”<sup>2</sup> Poverty, therefore, was one of the biggest domestic issues that governments had to deal with.

This had been so since Tudor times. In the eyes of its administration, there were two kinds of poor: deserving and non-deserving. The former consisted of the impotent poor, elderly, children and widows. The latter were able-bodied men, with no distinction between those who were idle by choice and those unable to find employment.<sup>3</sup> The first statutes of the poor laws from 1531-15872 illustrate this mindset of the Tudor governments. All of these statutes essentially prescribe the relief of the impotent poor, and the punishment of vagrants, wandering poor from other regions. The Act of 1531 allowed licensed paupers to beg within their parishes of origins.<sup>4</sup> In accordance with the Act of 1536, churchwardens collected voluntary donations from members of parishes for charitable purposes. These donations became less voluntary, as the Act of 1552 stated that parsons and bishops were to “persuade” those who were not willing to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London, 1970-83), 19 December 1666 via Liza Picard *Restoration London* (New York, 1998), p.253.

<sup>2</sup> John Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (New York, 1986), p.23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.



give funds to the relief of the poor. Three years later, persuasion evolved into fines, and mandatory poor rates were thus established.<sup>5</sup> Vagabonds were not only excluded from parochial relief, but faced persecution. Punishments of vagrants ranged from being whipped, as prescribed by the Acts of 1531 and 1550, to being bound as slaves for two years, according to the 1541 Act.<sup>6</sup> Harsh punishments reflect the mentality of the poor laws towards vagrants: that they were to be feared and kept under control.<sup>7</sup>

Another means employed by the Tudor administration to alleviate poverty was to give the poor a livelihood. Children were given apprenticeship and the elderly were put to work beginning in 1547.<sup>8</sup> It was not until the Act of 1576, titled “For setting of the poor on work and for avoiding idleness,” that the able-bodied who were willing to but unable to find work were finally set apart from vagrants. This act required that every town must have stocks of material available for the poor to work on, and each county must erect “houses of correction” for those who refused to work.<sup>9</sup> These laws were expanded towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth I into the first comprehensive national poor relief system in western history. In 1598, the responsibilities of putting the poor to work and collecting poor rates were officially placed in the hands of churchwardens and overseers in each parish. Justices of the peace (JP) were to whip vagrants and send them back to their home parishes.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (London, 1990), p.60.

<sup>6</sup> Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy*, p.40.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>9</sup> Slack, *English Poor Law*, p.60.

Very few alterations were made in the early Stuarts; although in response to the plague, rates were collected for those infected in 1604 and the Privy Council temporarily expanded relief during famines in the 1620s.<sup>10</sup> Interrupted by the Civil Wars and the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the next important statute concerning the poor came in 1662 under Charles II. It was entitled Act of Settlement and allowed JPs to remove poor newcomers to their parishes of origin within 40 days of arrival.<sup>11</sup> There was a religious as well as social and economic reason for the government and parishes to partake in charity. The Royal Injunction of 1547, for example, stated, “Whatsoever is given for their comfort is given for Christ himself.”<sup>12</sup> Despite the inclusive significance of religion, the idea of taking care of only those in one’s own community was deeply rooted in parochial relief. As the law placed the impoverished in the hands of the parish, each was responsible only for its own and not a person more. Removing needy newcomers and punishing vagrants exemplify this partiality to those that truly “belong.”

During the English Civil War, a new Christian religious sect emerged under the leadership of George Fox. The Society of Friends, most commonly known as the Quakers, benefited greatly from the religious toleration during the Cromwellian Commonwealth. It flourished and became one of the most successful religious communities in trade. It was, however, not only active in business, but also focused inward on its own community. Quakers were no different from other British subjects at the time, and many of them struggled to keep themselves afloat financially. The Society of Friends had an internal scheme of aid for the poor.

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<sup>10</sup> Slack, *English Poor Law*, p.61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

What is remarkable about Quaker charity was that it was administered by women, while parochial relief was almost solely operated by men.<sup>13</sup> Like the parishes, female Friends sought to find employment for the able-bodied, relief for the impotent and sustainability for all poor. Their method, however, deviated from what was the norm at the time. Their poor rates, called “collections,” were not explicitly obligatory. They not only gave out sums of money as donations and allowances, they also issued loans. Their definition of the “deserving poor” slightly differed from that of the parishes. Aid was given on the basis of good religious behavior as defined by the Society – needy Friends were turned away due to misconduct. Both the involvement of women in poor relief and the method by which it was administered are best explained by the Quaker agenda to use charity as a means to unify the community, in addition to assisting the poor.

The manner in which female Friends managed relief and why they were entrusted with the task are issues that have not been directly addressed by historians. While scholars have illuminated different aspects of the history of female Friends and of the administration of poor relief, there is a gap in scholarly writing where these areas of history intersect. Existing scholarly works on parochial relief outline the various acts of the Tudor and Stuart governments.<sup>14</sup> While they are essential for understanding the backdrop and mentality of English charity up to the late eighteenth century, they make no mention of the Quaker charity that took place around the same

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<sup>13</sup> A rare example of parochial relief that was handled by women was the “select women” of Norwich in 1571. These women were appointed to oversee the employment of other poor women in the city. They were also in charge of providing rudimentary education to poor children. Though these women were given a salary by the city and cannot refuse their position. See “Orders for the Select Women” in *The Records of the City of Norwich Vol II* ed. William Hudson and J.C. Tingey (London, 1910), p.356.

<sup>14</sup> Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy*; Slack, *English Poor Law*.

time. Historians of Friends discuss the inclusive attitude of the Society towards the poor and how charity would bring about unity in the community.<sup>15</sup> While this type of literature acknowledges women's presence in charity, it does not provide detailed information about the nature of relief or why women were the administrators.

On the other hand, literature on Quaker women usually overlooks the gendered aspect of Quaker charity.<sup>16</sup> These sources tend to discuss at length female Friends as preachers, writers, prisoners and missionaries in other continents. These scholars clarify the theological basis for women's active participation in religious matters – the belief that once God inspired someone, she was fit to carry out His works regardless of gender. They also provide information on women's meetings, but mostly in light of the debate over women's meetings per se and how their proponents defended the institution. Some Quakers disagreed with the notion of separate women's meetings; they believed women should be present at the men's monthly meetings, but not partake in discussion.<sup>17</sup> The origins of women's meetings and their purposes provide a preliminary understanding of the institution through which Quaker charity was administered. Historians acknowledge that the bulk of Quaker charity was administered by women, yet they do not elaborate on the gendered aspect of charity in the same way that they do other activities carried out by female Friends. While biographies of prominent Quaker women touch on the

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<sup>15</sup> Auguste Jorns, *Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work*, trans. Thomas Kite Brown (Montclair, 1969), p.56; Arnold Lloyd, *Quaker Social History 1669-1738* (Westport, 1979, orig 1950); Syney V. James, *A People Among Peoples* (Cambridge, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century* (York, 1991); Mabel R. Brailsford, *Quaker Women 1650-1690* (London, 1915); Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women*, (Berkeley, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, p.110.

subject of charity, they do not discuss charity in the larger context of the entire community of the Society of Friends.<sup>18</sup> Often, they devote a significant amount of time to the charitable activities of an individual, but draw no comparison with men or other women's meetings.

A more complete understanding of Quaker women's involvement in charity requires an examination of the minutes, account books and correspondence from a variety of monthly meetings. Meetings were the basic structure of the church of the Society of Friends. Starting in 1668, national Yearly Meetings were held in London. At their conception, Yearly Meetings were there for Quakers to consult one another on matters of the church and faith, as well as to allow them to check on one another's behavior.<sup>19</sup> As time went on, the Yearly Meetings gained more importance in issuing legislation, dealing with prisoners and financial matters.<sup>20</sup> Their epistles were widely read and circulated all over the country. The lower division of meetings was the Quarterly Meetings, which at first kept registers of births, marriages and deaths. Gradually, they began to oversee the actions of the local monthly meetings.<sup>21</sup> Each town or city had its own men and women's monthly meetings, which dealt with marriage approvals, disciplinary issues, disputes and, especially for women, relief of the poor. The records of these women's meetings will shed light on the actions of the nature of Quaker charity and its administration.

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<sup>18</sup> Bonnelyn Y. Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism* (Stanford, 1994); Helen G. Crossfield, *Margaret Fell of Swarthmoor Hall* (London, 1913); Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism* (London, 1949).

<sup>19</sup> William Beck and T. Frederick Ball, *The London Friends' meetings; Showing the rise of the Society of Friends in London; its progress, and the development of its discipline; with account* (London, 2009, orig 1869), p.52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

One of the meetings that is particularly useful for its notes on relief is the Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting. Founded in 1671, this meeting was especially significant to the Society of Friends as it was the local meeting of Margaret Fell, wife of George Fox and one of the most prominent female Quakers.<sup>22</sup> The Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting Minutes survive from 1669 until 1680.<sup>23</sup> These minutes are comprehensive, with details on the reasons behind giving and refusal of aid. Their precision is particularly helpful in determining the discriminatory nature of Quaker charity.

Another important female Quaker meeting was that of London.<sup>24</sup> While its meeting minutes do not survive, a very detailed account book of its finances sheds light on the operation of charity of the London women, whose meetings are often called the "Box Meetings," as each member had to donate money into a box before taking her seat.<sup>25</sup> The account book's records begin in 1669 and end in 1680, with over 600 entries. Not only was London the heart of the network of the Society of Friends, but some of the most prominent Quaker women also resided in London and played an important part in administering aid. The bulk of records of the Box Meetings concerns loans. An analysis of how loans were given and whether or not they were returned will also be beneficial to a comprehensive understanding of female Friends' administration of charity.

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<sup>22</sup> Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, p.115.

<sup>23</sup> Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting (SWMM) minutes 1669-1680.

<sup>24</sup> London Box Meeting (LBM) account book 1669-1680.

<sup>25</sup> Beck and Ball, *The London Friends' Meetings*, p.345.

The final source that offers information on the means of Quaker charity distribution is the York Women's Monthly Meetings.<sup>26</sup> Surviving records of this meeting begin in 1674 and end in 1681, with over 300 entries. Even though the York Women's Monthly Meeting minutes lack the rich details of those of Swarthmore and London and do not seem to hold much value on their own, they are particularly useful when contrasted with those of the York Men's Monthly Meetings. Fortunately, the first record in the minutes of the York men's meeting is in 1668 and the final in 1682 – of the same time period as that of the women's.<sup>27</sup> While there is evidence of charitable activities, it is apparent that the York men's meeting also dealt with administrative matters. It represents other men's meetings that were also involved in poor relief. The comparison between the two meetings will provide some insight into how Quaker men and women differently administer charity.

On the other hand, the Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting, whose minutes survive from 1668-1674, mostly occupied themselves with matters of publications and internal disputes, with very little mention of poor relief.<sup>28</sup> The contents of the Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meetings are problematic; they provide no information on how the poor male Quakers of Swarthmore were assisted. While this could be attributed to missing documents, it leaves the discussion on Swarthmore inconclusive. An exploration of the men's minutes does, however, provide an understanding of the different duties of the two meetings and the role of women in the larger Society of Friends.

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<sup>26</sup> York Women's Monthly Meetings (YWMM) 1674-1767.

<sup>27</sup> York Men's Monthly Meeting (YMMM) minutes 1668-1682.

<sup>28</sup> Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting (SWMM) minutes 1668-1674.

An interesting addition to the hierarchy of Quaker meetings, the London Six Weeks Meeting was attended by both men and women.<sup>29</sup> Founded in 1671, it was intended to oversee and act as a court of appeal for the monthly meetings within the city.<sup>30</sup> Records of the London Six Weeks meetings provide another perspective on the men's participation in charity, one in which they directly collaborated with women Friends and oversaw large development projects, such as founding a school for the children of the poor.

All of the earliest century account books and meeting minutes of both women and men's meetings are dated roughly within the 1670s, after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and before William Penn was granted Pennsylvania in 1681. The relative political stability during this period allows for a more straightforward analysis of the Quakers' charitable activities. Given the relative novelty of the group and settling of monthly meetings, records before than the 1660s are rare. While the Friends continued to hold meetings and provide for the poor well after 1681, a focus on earlier sources reveals the workings Quaker charity at its conception.

Other records that supplement the discussion of Quaker charity include personal account books and writings of individual Friends, as well as epistles from other meetings. Sarah Fell, daughter of Margaret Fell and member of the Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting, kept a personal account book for herself and her family.<sup>31</sup> The Fells often lent money to the poor, both male and female, independent of the women's meetings. Sarah Fell's generosity to both sexes

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<sup>29</sup> Transcript of London Six Weeks Meetings (LSWM) minutes 1671-1682.

<sup>30</sup> Beck and Ball, *The London Friend's Meetings*, p.93.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account book of Sarah Fell* ed. Norman Penney (Cambridge, 1920).



suggests that wealthy Quaker families were a source of financial assistance for Swarthmore men. An assessment of Fell's personal records sheds light on the mindset of a particular female Quaker, who not only was a benefactor to the monthly meeting but also to the poor on her own accord.

While epistles contain no records of giving specific aid, they present the concept and ideology of Quaker charity as well as Friends' perception of gender. Epistles from the Yearly Meetings are important instructive sources on the theological principles underpinning Quaker charity.<sup>32</sup> They can also be held as a standard to determine whether the local meetings maintained the Friends principles of charity. Epistles from George Fox to men and women meetings offer an insight into the mind of the most influential Quaker and how his teachings affected the rest of the Society.

Other important Friends whose writings supplement information on Quaker theology include Margaret Fell and John Bellers. Fell's essays and epistles provide information on how the Society of Friends defended women's active participation in the church. It is apparent from one of her most famous essays, "Women Speaking Justified," that Quakers believed in the equal and unified creation of men and women.<sup>33</sup> The latter was not regarded as inferior until Eve

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<sup>32</sup> Society of Friends, *A Collection of the Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends in London to the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings* (Baltimore: Cole and Hewes, 1806); John Fry. *An Alphabetical Extract of all the Annual Printed Epistles which have been sent to the Several Quarterly-meetings of the People call'd Quakers: in England and elsewhere, from their yearly-meeting...from the year 1682 to 1762 inclusive*. (London, [1762?]).

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Fell, "Women's Speaking Justified" in Trevett, C. (edd.) *Women's Speaking Justified and other seventeenth-century Quaker writings about women* (London, 1989).

caused the Fall of Man. They were, therefore, vital in the unity and Restoration of the Kingdom of God for which Friends strived.

In 1696, Bellers wrote extensively on the subject of poor relief and putting the poor to work. A zealous Quaker, his discourse is an important source that illustrates the perception of the poor and charity of the Friends' community.<sup>34</sup> Like the parishes, Friends saw the poor as an integral part in their communities who needed to be assisted. Though Bellers' essays were written after the time period of the records of the meetings, they still hold true to the principle of Quaker philanthropy and are still beneficial for a study of the subject.

These sources reveal that Quakers perceive charity as a means to help the poor and create unity within the community, which explains both female Friends' involvement and their particular methods of aid distribution. Women and poor Friends were both perceived as integral parts of the Society. Allowing the former to manage generous relief to the latter was thus a significant step towards solidarity. While their freedom was limited to certain spheres in their small communities, Quaker women's achievements were remarkable in the seventeenth century and cannot be overlooked. The study of their administration of poor relief is but a small piece in the rich history of Quakers and western charity.

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<sup>34</sup> John Bellers, *His Life, Times and Writings*, ed. George Clarke (London, 1987).

## Chapter 1: Why women?

“About the year 1659, it pleased the Lord to move those servants of his, Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, to cross the seas, to preach the gospel of Christ, as they were moved of him, to the inhabitants of Alexandria.

They were at sea between London and Plymouth many weeks, and one day they had some exercises. And between Plymouth and Leghorn they were thirty one days in which time they had many trials and storms both within and without; but the Lord delivered 'em out of them all.”<sup>1</sup>

This extract from *A True Account of the Great Trials and Cruel Sufferings* by Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers is indicative of the accomplishments of Quaker women in the seventeenth century. The first was their works as missionaries, leaving behind their husbands and children to travel to places even beyond Europe.<sup>2</sup> When the colonies were founded, women made up 45 percent of Quaker missionaries who arrived in America during the late seventeenth-century.<sup>3</sup> Being missionaries meant they preached, not only to other women, but also to men – a remarkable position of authority that was difficult for women to achieve elsewhere. The co-authorship of *A True Account* by Evans and Cheevers also demonstrates that women wrote extensively on their experiences, relationships with God, and sometimes even in defense of their own ministry.<sup>4</sup> Female Friends, not only enjoyed the benefits, but also embraced the

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, *A brief history of the voyage of Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers to the island of Malta...To which is added a short relation from George Robinson, of the Sufferings which befell him in his journey to Jerusalem* (London, 1715), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on Quaker missionary women, see: Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light* (New York, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (Southampton: The Camelot Press, 1985), p.26.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Quaker women's writings see: David Booy, *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women* (Hampshire, 2004); Kate Peters, *Print Culture and the Early*

disadvantages of this freedom: prosecution both in England and internationally. Evans and Cheevers spoke of their “many trials” when they were captured on their voyages abroad. In England, one third of all prosecuted Quakers between 1654 and 1659 were female.<sup>5</sup>

Such liberty for women was extremely rare in the seventeenth century and was deeply rooted in their theology.<sup>6</sup> The Quakers believed in the “Inner Light” and the unity of man and woman in God’s creation. Once God inspired a person, regardless of her sex, she possessed His “Inner Light” and was fit to carry out His works. Historians have noted that because of the “Inner Light,” women preachers “transcended” their womanhood and were preaching as “genderless” souls under God’s command instead of as women.<sup>7</sup>

Due to this notion, George Fox did not discriminate against women ministry. He wrote, “sons and daughters should prophesy...and the pouring forth of the Spirit upon servants and

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*Quakers* (Cambridge, 2005); Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community* (Hampshire, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, p.26.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note, however, that Quaker theology is not inherently feminist. They did not argue for women’s liberation and conceded the fact that women were still the “weaker vessel.” Women were fit to perform the works of God *despite* their innate weakness. For further information on feminist theology, see Ruether, Rosemary R. *Sexism and God-Talk*. London, 1992; Ruether, Rosemary R. *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*. Minneapolis, 2007; Young, Pamela D. “Women in Christianity,” *Women and Religious Traditions*, eds. Leona M. Anderson and Pamela D. Young. Oxford, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women* (Berkeley, 1992), pp.236-7; Mack also noted that when preaching, these women also portrayed masculine qualities and reflect feminine images away from themselves. The disconnect between the female body and genderless souls is the reason why female Quaker preachers to fall outside the feminist category. Mack concludes, however, that the fluid representation of gendered qualities in these women preachers is what makes them “visionary.”<sup>7</sup>

hand-maids that everyone should have something to speak to the glory of God.”<sup>8</sup> He also stated, “Are all true Christians priests? Yes. What! Are women priests? Yes, women priests.”<sup>9</sup> This endeavor was particularly remarkable for a religious community in the early modern period, especially when multiple biblical passages explicitly forbade such actions: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church;” and “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp the authority over the man, but to be in silence.”<sup>10</sup>

In defense of their women preachers, Friends also turned to scripture and cited passages with precedents for women ministry. In *Women’s Speaking Justified* (1666), for example, Margaret Fell argued that, after his Resurrection, Jesus said to Mary, “Go to my brethren and say unto them I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.”<sup>11</sup> Mary, a woman, was first the messenger of Christ after his revival. In 1674 another Friend, George Keith, offered the example of the woman preacher of Samaria. After discovering that Jesus was the Messiah, “The woman...went her way into the city and saith to the men, Come see a man, which told me all things that I ever did: is not this Christ? Then they went of the city, and came unto

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<sup>8</sup> George Fox, “An exhortation to set up women’s meetings” in Trevett C. (edd.) *Women’s Speaking Justified and other seventeenth-century Quaker writings about women* (London, 1989), p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Fox, “An exhortation,” p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Cor. 14:34-35 NIV; 1Tim. 2:11-12 NIV

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Fell, “Women’s Speaking Justified”, p.8.

him.”<sup>12</sup> Keith argued that she was not only a predecessor of women preachers, but also a role model for all Christians:

First of all, she was taught by Christ, by Christ himself; she was taught immediately, and being thus taught, she believed on him, and then she went and preached him. This is an excellent pattern and example unto all true ministers and preachers of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

By applying such passages to their theology, the Quakers were able to justify, at least to themselves, the legitimacy of women ministry.

In addition to joint meetings for worship, Quaker women also had separate administrative meetings. Fox initiated the idea and, as usual, supported it with passages from Scripture. He utilized the anecdote that “the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephtha” as biblical proof that women held their own meetings in ancient times. His incentive for founding women's meetings was that he wanted the women to tend to the “sick, the poor, prisoners, widows and orphans, as well as the moral oversight of women.”<sup>14</sup> This extract illustrates that Fox intended to place charitable matters in the hands of women from the beginning – a stark departure from the conventional male-dominated parochial relief at the time.

While Fox instigated this concept, female overseers of the poor were as rooted in Quaker theology as that of women preachers. The same religious explanation – the Inner Light – which had already allowed women so much freedom, could justify their participation in alleviating

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<sup>12</sup> John 4:5-42 NIV

<sup>13</sup> George Keith, *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria* (n.p., 1674), p.2 via Catherine M. Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry in Seventeenth Century English Quakerism* (New York, 1995), p.222.

<sup>14</sup> Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, p.155.

poverty. An epistle from the 1686 London Yearly Meeting described “the relief of our poor Friends” as “good and Christian work” that all members of the society should take up.<sup>15</sup> Charity was widely recognized as a Christian duty, as was spreading the word of God. There was no reason for Friends to distinguish between the different kinds of works of the Lord. There were even biblical precedents of women helping those in hardship. For example,

“I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”<sup>16</sup>

Phoebe was described as a “succourer,” meaning she offered assistance to those in hardship and distress – a clear antecedent of women overseers of the poor. The Friends could have easily pointed to such passages in defense of placing charity in the hands of women.

The other aspect of their theology which allowed for women’s active participation in religious matters was the Society’s belief in the unity of men and women. The subordination of women in Christianity originated from the Fall of Man, during which Eve was unable to resist the temptation of the serpent and took the forbidden fruit. She convinced Adam to imitate and thus men were cast out of the Garden of Eden. This led to a belief that women were inferior to men, more susceptible to temptations and even sometimes dangerous.<sup>17</sup> The Quakers, however,

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<sup>15</sup> *A Collection of the Epistles*, p.27.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 16:1-2

<sup>17</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850* (New York, 1998), pp.16-18; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995), pp.61-64.

pointed to the creation, in which man and woman were equal and unified. This concept is exemplified in an epistle from George Fox to the Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting:

“Man & woman, was helps meet in the image of God and righteousness and holiness, in the dominion before they fell, but after the fall, in the transgression the man was to rule over his wife, but in the restoration by Christ, into the image of God and righteousness and holiness again...as they was before the fall, Sarah obeyed Abraham & called him Lord, Abraham must obey the voice of his wife Sarah...”<sup>18</sup>

To the Quakers, man's rule over his wife was a consequence of the Fall, indicating that there was no such “rule” in the kingdom of God. The coming of Christ would reverse these effects, thus placing women back into the dominion, holy, equal and unified with men as they once were.<sup>19</sup> Female Friends, therefore, were an essential part of a unified community for which the Quakers strived.

For the Society of Friends, the charity was not only a duty, but also a means to unify the community. In 1705, the Yearly Meetings, the highest center of all Quaker meetings, “earnestly desired that, above all things, Friends hold fervent charity in the body that will keep members together in a blessed concord and communion.”<sup>20</sup> This mindset persisted well into the nineteenth century. The index of *A Collection of the Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends in London to the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings in Great-Britain, Ireland and elsewhere*, compiled in 1805, listed “charity” under the heading of “unity.”<sup>21</sup> Like the parishes, Friends aspired to care

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<sup>18</sup> SWMM, p.8.

<sup>19</sup> Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry*, p.163.

<sup>20</sup> Fry, *An alphabetical extract*, p.109.

<sup>21</sup> *A Collection of the Epistles*, index.



for those who belonged in their community and to alleviate their suffering. This mindset explained why charity had always been at the forefront of Quaker activities. The solidarity of the Society of Friends entailed the inclusion of both the wealthy and impoverished members.

The concept of unity in poor relief explains why Fox saw that women were vital to this aspect of the unification of the Society of Friends. Because Quakers' ultimate goal was the restoration of men and women in Christ, the latter were inherently and intrinsically essential to any form of unity within the Society of Friends. Fox encouraged "all the faithful men and women...be stirred up in their inheritances of the same gospel and to labor in it." This will "let [them] meet in the restoration, as in man and woman [were] before the Fall."<sup>22</sup> To Fox, men and women working together towards achieving the works of God was a vital part of attaining restoration. Giving women the task of charity – unifying the community – was only logical.

While theology had a significant influence on the Society of Friends, one cannot overlook other social and practical circumstances which contributed, directly and indirectly, to women's participation in poor relief. One of these concerned the Quaker perception of the poor in their community. Not only were they a part of the Society of Friends, their poor were also less dangerous than those of others. This concept of the docile poor was exemplified in the writings of John Bellers, a prominent Quaker involved in poor relief. Bellers came from a wealthy family within the Society and had a strong religious upbringing. In 1680, he was appointed the Treasurer of the Box Fund of the London Six Weeks Meetings, which took care of the poor Friends in London in addition to the monthly meetings.<sup>23</sup> He wrote extensively on the issue of

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<sup>22</sup> SWMM, p.23.

<sup>23</sup> John Bellers, *His Life, Times and Writings*, ed. George Clarke (London, 1987), pp.1-4.  
2013-2014 Penn Humanities Forum Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Research Fellowship, 23  
Final Paper May 2014, Panarat Anamwathana, College'14, University of Pennsylvania

poverty. One of his essays was “Proposals for Raising a College of Industry,” in which he suggested employing the poor to work as a means to alleviate poverty.<sup>24</sup> One of his arguments for hiring the poor Friends was that “[Quaker] poor being less vicious than other poor are, (debauchery being the bane of industry) it will be the easier to put them into a good method.”<sup>25</sup>

The same premise of the harmless poor could also justify Quaker women participating in poor relief. The main difference between parochial and Quaker relief was the threat of vagrants. Women, who were traditionally perceived as kind and nurturing, were not able to manage charity in the parishes due to such danger.<sup>26</sup> The increasingly severe punishment of rogues throughout the years, which culminated in the Act of Settlement, demonstrates the widespread fear and contempt towards the dangerous and foreign poor. Male justices of the peace, therefore, were necessary. The parishes could not have let the weaker sex face such vicious threats.

Relief by the women’s meetings, however, was an internal affair. Without the threat of hostile vagrants and having a “less vicious” poor, the nurturing qualities of women became an advantage in managing poor relief. It is apparent that Fox associated poor relief with women’s meetings from the very start. He, however, was not alone. Male Friends believed that taking care of the needy was an important agenda, but they felt that it was not as “proper for the men as for

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53; It is important to keep in mind, however, that Quakers had been putting the poor to work well before Bellers wrote the essay in 1695.

<sup>25</sup> Bellers, *His Life*, p.48.

<sup>26</sup> Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, p.23.

the women to visit the sick, and to search out the necessities of the poor, weak, widows and aged.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, elderly women and children made up the majority of recipients.

Had rogues been an issue in the Quaker community, would theological rationalization have carried enough weight to allow women overseers? It might not. With such perception of the poor, it is evident that women Friends were not able to overcome the traditional feminine qualities. Instead, Quakers cleverly used the conventional gender role of women as mothers and nurturers to their advantage in the circumstances with which they were presented. In *A Brief Treatise of Religious Women’s Meetings Services and Testimonies*, Hugh Wood pointed to a passage in the Old Testament: “[The peoples] shall bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips; and kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens will be your nursing mothers.”<sup>28</sup> Having grounded his argument in Scripture, Wood stated,

“Was it not here foretold that women also should be nourishers or nurses in Christ’s church? And if they be nurses, they must have something to give to the children, and milk in their breasts to the babes: and if a woman have the milk of the word of God in her breasts, to wit, in her heart, let her not hide nor keep it back, but she must give it forth to the hungry babes.”<sup>29</sup>

With such justification, handing the care of the needy to women was not only essential to their religious objectives, but was also giving women the opportunity to play their rightful parts in the kingdom of God.

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<sup>27</sup> Beck and Ball, *The London Friends’ Meetings*, p.346.

<sup>28</sup> Isa 49:21-22 NIV

<sup>29</sup> Hugh Wood, *A brief treatise of religious women meetings services and testimonies* (N.p., 1684) pp.44-45.

Above all theological and social reasons, Quakers were practical people, and this quality dictated that women overseers were most efficient way for the community to tend to the needy. Their practicality is demonstrated in the purpose of their charitable schemes. Generous and grounded in theology as they were, their worldly intention was to allow the poor to sustain themselves through employment or their own business. Similar to parochial overseers who enrolled idle able-bodied poor into workhouses, the Quakers aimed towards “the help to self-help.” Their attention to the unique necessity of individuals and implementation of what historians have termed “constructive relief” were, however, innovative and ahead of their time.<sup>30</sup> This is exemplified in their methods of giving sustainable aid, fitting the poor with enduring resources, and even issuing loans in order for them to initiate some form of livelihood. The same ideology was put forth in Bellers’ *Proposal*, which pointed to the three benefits that came out of hiring impoverished Friends: “First, a profit for the rich (which will be life to the rest). Secondly, a plentiful living for the poor, without difficulty. Thirdly, a good education for youth that may tend to prepare their souls into the nature of good ground.”<sup>31</sup>

Bellers’ third point also illustrates Quakers’ particular attention to education for poor children, which was another means of constructive relief. Religious education for young Quakers was an important agenda for the early Society of Friends, whose members could not and would not send their children to public schools. Soon Quakers began to realize the importance of

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<sup>30</sup> Jorns *Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work*), p.72; Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>31</sup> Bellers, *His Life*, pp.1-4.

education, both religious and secular for children of the poor.<sup>32</sup> A 1690 epistle from the London Yearly Meeting clearly states:

“It is our Christian and earnest advice...to provide school masters and mistresses who are faithful Friends, to teach and instruct their children. And not to send them to such schools where they are taught the corrupt ways...And parents and masters to be good examples to...a child or servant.”<sup>33</sup>

The inclusion of servants in the passage signifies the inclusion of impoverished children, who were often placed in Quaker homes as to work as assistants by the women’s meetings.

Given the practicality of Quakers, especially in their relief of the poor, one cannot neglect the simple efficiency of assigning the task of charity to women. The help to self-help was a complicated task, requiring extreme care and deliberation. Had Fox decided to let the men take complete charge of poor relief, they would be handling it on top of issues of publications and business matters. Utilizing the other half of its population was efficient and practical for the Society as a whole.

While Quaker women were not able to break free from the traditional role of mothers, their abilities to use it to their advantage, and their achievements as ministers and missionaries in the Society was still incredibly remarkable. These same accomplishments, and the skill with which they were attained, were also present in the practice of aid distribution of Quaker women’s meetings.

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<sup>32</sup> Jorns, *Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work*, p.100.

<sup>33</sup> *A Collection of the epistles*, p.38.

## Chapter 2: Aid distribution and recipients

Quaker women encouraged “all Friends” to “take special care for the poor, for those that stand in need...and widows that hath young children, that they be relieved, and helped, till they be able and fit to be put to apprentices or servants.”<sup>1</sup> This extract is one of many that demonstrate their active involvement in charity. All female poor relief was operated out of the women’s meetings. From their minutes and account books, one is able to reconstruct the different procedures of each meeting in collecting and disbursing relief. The process started at each monthly meeting’s collections, in which members donate a sum of money for the meetings to manage.

For each monthly meeting, collections from its members were the main resource for funds for the poor. For the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meetings (SWMM), collections were brought in separately from three smaller preparatory meetings, namely Hawkshead, Cartmell and Swarthmore. There were months in which all three brought in their contributions. Most of the time, however, only one was responsible for bringing in funds, usually the one which belonged to the place where that particular session was held. The monthly meeting would then together order another to bring in collections for the next month. On 4 May 1676, for example, the meeting was held in Thomas Barrow’s house in Cartmell and the women of Cartmell brought in their collection (10s 8d). The monthly meeting then ordered the women of Swarthmore to bring in their collection to the next monthly meeting. Almost a month later, on 1 June 1676, the meeting convened in Swarthmore and the women of Swarthmore had collected £1 9s 4d for that

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<sup>1</sup> Milton D. Speizman and Jane C. Kronick, “A Seventeenth-century Quaker Women’s Declaration,” *Signs* 1:1 (1975), p.243 via Kunze, *Margaret*, p.84.

month. The minutes included the instruction for “Hawkshead Meeting to bring in their collection to our next meeting.”<sup>2</sup> These collections from members were to go into the “stock” of the women’s meetings, which was for the use of the women’s meeting, mostly for charity and poor relief.

The York Women’s Monthly Meetings held no records of preparatory meetings, and each month a collection was gathered and recorded at the beginning of the session. The minutes of the York women’s meeting often lack sufficient detail. It was, therefore, possible that it consisted of preparatory meetings, but failed to mention the fact in its minutes.

As the minutes of the London Box Meeting did not survive, there is no record of its preparatory meetings. It did convene at different meetinghouses from month to month, as the Swarthmore Women did.<sup>3</sup> The unique aspect of the Box Meeting was evident of collections from “brethrens.” It was safe to assume that these brethrens were the London men’s meetings, and that they were contributing to the women’s funds of poor relief. These contributions explain the nature of the body of recipients of the Box Meeting, which consisted of both men and women.

Another unique aspect of the London Box Meeting’s collection process was that they received large sums of money from benefactors. These benefactors were mostly female, and usually gave 50 or 60 pounds, along with the permission to distribute the fund as the meeting saw fit. A woman named Ellen Dubber, for example, gave the LWMM £60 on 1 October 1673. The £60 was then broken down to smaller sums of money and lent to different people. Thomas

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<sup>2</sup> SWMM, pp.42-43.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the most frequented meeting places were Rebecca Traverse’s house, at Devonshire House and in Bullmouth.

Taylor, John Graves and Robert Lodge each received a loan of 30s (£10 10s) in 1674. It seemed that Dubber also had a say in how her donation was handled. 20s was given “by her order” to a widow in Southwark, and £7 was lent to charity “Ellen’s consent.”<sup>4</sup>

Another example of a benefactor was Frances Polstead. Instead of giving the meeting a large sum of money once, she donated £20 three times in the course of the two years “for the use and service as managed by the women Friends.” The meeting recorded that she “desired [the funds] for the stock to lend poor Friends.”<sup>5</sup> In 1674 another woman who donated twice to the Box Meeting, gave 5 pounds which “she desired...toward stock to let the poor work in spinning.”<sup>6</sup>

Whether by one large contribution or a series of smaller installments, these women entrusted the Box Meeting with copious amounts of money with the desire to assist the poor both in the form of loans and in order to find employment for the impoverished. Their donations illustrate the mindset of Quaker women towards assisting the poor. They were willing to relieve the poor even further than their normal monthly collections with supererogatory donations.

Another explanation for this practice was the abstemious value of the Society of Friends. Despite their success in business, the Quakers were also known for modesty and despising worldly goods. Any superfluous wealth was best put to the aid of the poor. An epistle from the London Yearly Meeting advised the rich “that they apply not the blessing of God to the indulging of their appetites in pleasure and vanity, but they be ready to do good, and to

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<sup>4</sup> LBM, p.8B.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14B.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12B.



communicate relief to the necessitous.”<sup>7</sup> These women of London were simply obeying the codes of Quaker piety and moderation.

The special donations, as well as being a larger meeting, explains why the Box Meeting had the highest average collection by more than twice that of the other meetings.<sup>8</sup> The Swarthmore meeting’s average collection was 19s and 3d. York had a similar mean of 16s and 5d. The London women, however, had an average of £5 17s and 8d, about 4 times that of the other two meetings. This was, however, reasonable and justifiable as the Box Meeting had a much larger number of dependents than the other three.<sup>9</sup>

As they did with their means of collection, the three meetings all had different methods of distributing funds. The four distinct ways of giving monetary aid were via loans, monthly allowances, for specific uses and by offering or helping the poor in a livelihood. The goal of Quaker aid, however, was “help to self-help,” with the hopes of guiding those in need to self-sustainability and support in the future.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, there are indicators of putting poor widows and orphans to work in the houses of different members for all three meetings, as well as giving them aid to start a business or a career.

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<sup>7</sup> Fry, *An alphabetical extract*, p.77.

<sup>8</sup> In order to compare all meetings in terms of how much money they each had, an average amount of money collected in each monthly meeting was calculated. Since there were unequal amounts of records for all three, a total amount of money collected would have been misleading. The average, therefore, was the best method to illustrate the differences.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the recipients, see p.38

<sup>10</sup> Jorns, *The Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work*, p.62.

The first distinct method of aid distribution was issuing loans. This was not present in parochial relief at the time and was an innovative means of relief, especially for that which was operated by women. For the Swarthmore meeting, almost all of the loans were issued to women.<sup>11</sup> The details of these loans vary between recipients. In certain instances, the record would simply state “[lent] of the Women’s Meeting stock.”<sup>12</sup> Loans issued to “Old Jane Woodell,” were never accompanied with an explanation. Jane Colton’s records were also less detailed. On the numerous occasions when she received sums, the minute merely states “lent,” without any specification of the uses of the money. This dearth of detail was likely due to the meeting’s familiarity with both Woodell and Colton. They were both widows, and received special collections from the meetings along with these occasional loans. As they were already pensioners, the members were all well aware of their dire condition and saw no need to register it in the minutes.

Other records of the Swarthmore meeting were more detailed and specified what each loan was for. For example, a loan to a woman named Ellen Braithwaite was “lent out of the women’s meeting stock...towards buying her a cow and her uncle being dead has left her something so her need is not so much.”<sup>13</sup> Jenny Colton’s loans were mostly detailed, and

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<sup>11</sup> For the SWMM, many of the loans were recorded in Sarah Fell’s account book rather than the Meeting’s account book. Since Sarah Fell was designated to keep records of the meeting’s finances, as well as that of Swarthmore Hall, and she always indicated which stock (the meeting’s or her own) the loan was distributed from, it is therefore safe to refer to both books.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account*, p.414.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account*, p.306.

involved her most basic needs, such as to buy butter or chickens.<sup>14</sup> These details, while seemingly trivial, demonstrate that most of these funds went to the basic needs of the recipients and illustrate the dire conditions of the poor, who relied on the meeting for the ability to afford food.

Despite the lax repayment regulations, however, the Meeting was quite successful at receiving payments for their loans. Jane Woodell repaid all of her loans within two years, Jenny Colton within a matter of months. Out of the 20 cases of loans, 11 were repaid within a few weeks. Six were unpaid, and three were returned partially. It is noticeable that those who returned their loans regularly were the most frequent borrowers of the Swarthmore Women's Meeting. The recurrent pensioners were evidently encouraged to keep good relations with the meeting, as their livelihood was dependent upon it. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the reason they were given multiple loans and aid from the meeting was because they were responsible with repaying the money they had borrowed.

This was a stark contrast to the London Box Meeting's lending scheme. Members of a particular meeting that organized each loan were bound to it. If the person who took out the loan failed to repay his or her debt, the Friends who were "engaged" would have to repay it in his or her stead. The London meeting gave loans to women and men equally and, despite their elaborate lending conditions, had more records of unpaid than paid loans. From 1669 to 1680, there was a total of 41 loans, 18 issued to women, 17 to men and six to both women and men. For each loan, a specific scheme of repaying was laid out by the women's meetings. Edward Horton, for example, borrowed from the women's meeting on several occasions. In 1676, he

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.101, 107.

borrowed £5 for a period of five months.<sup>15</sup> For his second loan in 1677, he “promised to pay again in 1 year.”<sup>16</sup>

Evidence also reveals some that loans were paid back in small amounts. A man borrowed £5 in 1675 and the London meeting arranged for him “to pay to Mary Elson by 2s a week.”<sup>17</sup> A woman who also borrowed £5 had a similar requirement: she was to pay 2d a week back to the Women’s Meetings. In other cases, loans were made without conditions. In one instance, the account book simply state that the borrower “promised to pay again as he [was] able,” or that the loan was “for [her/him] to pay again in considerable time.”<sup>18</sup> Others records simply state “lent,” without any details of a specific scheme.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these details and conditions, the London Box Meetings saw a much lower repayment rate than the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meetings. This is apparent when the same account book was perused again in the 1680s, with annotations of whether each loan was repaid. Out of 42 cases of loans in the time frame, only 16 were paid by the borrowers. Six loans were paid by a combination of the borrowers and the Friends in the meeting, and 23 out of 42 loans were either paid by Friends in the meeting or were unaccounted for. A woman, for example, borrowed £5 in 1679 and promised to repay in installments of 5s a week. An annotation

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<sup>15</sup> LBM, p.29A.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41A.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27A.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8A,1A.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.59A, 23A.

that was added a decade later states, “so long and many Friends dead that they will not call for it.”<sup>20</sup>

	Paid by recipient	Paid by recipient and meeting	Unaccounted for	<b>Total</b>
Men	8	7	2	<b>17</b>
Women	6	12	0	<b>18</b>
Both	2	3	1	<b>6</b>
Unknown	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>42</b>

Table 2.1: Repayment of loans for the London Box Meeting

It is noticeable that there are more names in the account of the Box Meeting, perhaps simply because it was a much larger meeting than Swarthmore. There is also less repetition of names than in the accounts of that of Swarthmore. This could be attributed to the fact that the latter had fewer people to account for and, thus, one person showed up multiple times and in higher frequency. It could also be construed as the London meeting refusing to lend money to those who had not returned their previous loans.

Very few names appear more than once in the London account book. Those that do, however, send mixed messages. Edward Horton, for example, who took out three loans in total from the London Women’s Meetings, paid back all his former credits before taking out a new one. His first loan was in July 1676, and paid December of the same year.<sup>21</sup> His second loan was taken out in July of the next year.<sup>22</sup> He had paid his second loan in December that same year, and borrowed again in May 1679. He paid his final loan in 1681.<sup>23</sup> A similar example was John Hall

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<sup>20</sup> LBM, p61A.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29A.

<sup>22</sup> LBM, p.41A.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.63A.

and his wife Ruth, who borrowed from the London Meeting twice. They took out their first loan of £5 in 1674 and “proposed to pay again in two payments.”<sup>24</sup> They borrowed from the meeting again in 1677, but not before repaying their prior loan a year earlier.<sup>25</sup> These two cases seemed to support the notion that the meeting would not give out overlapping loans to recipients who had not repaid the money they had previously borrowed.

The case of Katherine Jacklin, however, undermines the prior assumption. Her loans in 1676 were only nine months apart (in January and October), and her first loan was not repaid until May 1677. There are no explanations as to why the meeting allowed Jacklin two consecutive loans, or if she was an exception because of unique circumstances. The details of her records merely states, “ordered by women’s meeting, lent” and “borrowed.”<sup>26</sup> While it is tempting to assume Jacklin was a specific exception that the meeting decided to make, there is not enough information to support this extrapolation.

It is a different story altogether for York. The women’s meeting records were much less detailed than those of Swarthmore and London. For most cases, the account book merely states, “disbursed out of the stock” and listed names of the recipients. There were only two cases of loan, recorded with very little detail. The first was in 1675 to a woman who borrowed 5s for a year.<sup>27</sup> The second was 10s lent to another in 1679.<sup>28</sup> Neither case was heard from again. This

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<sup>24</sup> LBM., p.14A.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37A.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.30-31A.

<sup>27</sup> YWMM, p.7.

could be attributed to lack of proper recordings or loss of records; in any case there is too little information to ascertain whether or not these loans were paid.

What is remarkable about all three local meetings is that there are no records of collecting interest. The amount of money that the meetings received when Quakers actually paid back their loans was exactly equal to the amount that was taken out. This signifies the sentiment of Friends towards the poor, as an important part of the Society of Friends. Interest on loans would defy the inclusivity of the poor into the community, and would undermine the concept of unity between the wealthy and impoverished that was the heart of Quaker charity.

While the London Box Meeting was most active in distributing loans, they left no record of distributing aid in the form of allowances. The York Women's Monthly Meetings, however, recorded employing this method for one of its pensioners, Elizabeth Vallance. A register for the only Elizabeth Vallance who was a Quaker in York states that she passed away in 1677. Despite the lack of a birth certificate, it could be extrapolated that Vallance was most likely an old woman at the time and was dependent on the aid of the York women's meetings.<sup>29</sup> The earliest record of Vallance in the meeting account book is in the last month of 1674, when she was given 10s out of the women's stock. No specific information is given as to what the money was for.<sup>30</sup> It is uncertain whether this 10s was an allowance or another form of aid. The first explicit record of her receiving an allowance is in the third month of 1675. She was given 4s with the explanation,

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<sup>28</sup> YWMM., p.14.

<sup>29</sup> Register of Burials for the Monthly Meeting of York, Yorkshire for 1653-1776, RG7/Piece 1117/ Folio 25.

<sup>30</sup> YWMM, p.4.

“for her month.”<sup>31</sup> Other records of Vallance are accompanied with the explanations of “for the 11<sup>th</sup> month,” or “4<sup>th</sup> month allowance.”<sup>32</sup> This signifies that she received her allowance monthly. Vallance’s name appears in the account book again 36 times, making her the most frequent aid recipient of the York meeting. Her allowance always varied between four to five shillings each month.

Other than her regular monthly allowance, there was one instant in 1675 which she received an extra 5s on top of her four-shilling monthly payment. The York meeting, unfortunately, did not record any explanation for the supererogatory aid. The latest record of Elizabeth Vallance receiving aid from the meeting was dated October 1677, which was consistent with her burial certificate.

Swarthmore meeting had a similar process for Jane Woodell, who also borrowed from the meeting’s stock. “Collections for Old Jane Woodell” were gathered on multiple occasions. There are still, however, records of Woodell receiving further financial assistance from the meeting’s stock to pay for items such as shoes and clothes. These collections, therefore, were most likely for her supply for every day needs. Though they were distinct from Elizabeth Vallance’s monthly allowance from the York Women’s Meeting, they were still similar as the recipient was simply given a sum of money without asking any further questions.

Giving persons a fixed amount of allowance seems to be contradictory to the purpose of Quaker aid, which was to encourage self-sustainability and self-help. This was perhaps the reason why it was the rarest method of giving aid, and possibly why the London meeting, with

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<sup>31</sup> YWMM., p.4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.



the largest number of dependents, disregarded it altogether as a means of aid distribution. Similar to parochial relief, the meetings employed this method only for those that were not capable of working or earning money for themselves.

Giving individuals occasional sums of money for particular causes, such as to mend shoes or to pay rent, was usual in all three meetings. They were not loans, as the recipient did not have to return the fund. They were also different from allowances in the respect that they were not regular and only given in specific circumstances. There are, however, records of recipients receiving aid for the same issue multiple times.

The highest number of records found for this type of relief was in Swarthmore. This could also be attributed to the arduous attention to detail in its account books. It is particularly important to pay attention to the uses of these grants, which shed light on the motives of the meetings in giving them. One of the numerous examples of receiving singular aid for a specific purpose was that of Jane Woodell, who also had collections gathered for her by the and borrowed money from the Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting. The meeting gave her sums from the women's stock to pay for her clothing, such as shoes and clothes.<sup>33</sup>

Jane Colton, who also took out loans from the meeting, received aid for "the supply of herself and her two children" twice in 1674 and 1675 each.<sup>34</sup> She also was given funds to buy pots and pans in 1674 and to fix her house in 1675. Several other women who were described as "poor and sickly" received much assistance from the Meeting.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> SWMM, pp.32, 47.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.28, 32, 34, 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.12, 28, 32, 49, 69.

A similar pattern could be detected in the two monthly meetings of York, which also gave funds to children and those who were described as sickly and needy. Widower Edward Colton, for example, was a frequent recipient of the York Women's Monthly Meeting; however, the aid was not for himself. In 1678, he was given £1 5s 6d, which was to go to his mother. Colton's wife, Jane, had been a frequent pensioner of the York Women's Meeting. She was given aid for her children and rent between 1675-1677. Jane Colton passed away on 1 September 1677 and was buried the next day.<sup>36</sup> The next month, Edward started receiving funds from the meeting for his children in her stead. He received 3s twice a year from 1677 to 1681 for "his children schooling."<sup>37</sup>

Another example is Susannah Bolton, who also received aid between 1674-1675 for "children schooling."<sup>38</sup> This was not, however, the only relief she received from the meeting; there are at least four other records of her receiving funds of 5s each between the two years. The purpose of these sums of money, however, was not specified.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the London Box Meeting gathered "special collections" for several children who were in need. For example, a son of a pensioner received a collection in the meeting of August 1678, which consisted of £4 6d. The children of a male Quaker also received £10 from a

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<sup>36</sup> Register of Burials for the Monthly Meeting of York, Yorkshire for 1653-1776, RG6/Piece 1117/Folio 25.

<sup>37</sup> YWMM, pp.12, 14, 17.

<sup>38</sup> YWMM, pp.4, 5, 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.3, 4.

special collection in the meeting in April of 1676. The LWMM were also generous in giving money for causes such as to pay the cobbler (to repair shoes) and to pay the tailor.<sup>40</sup>

From these examples, it is quite apparent that the meetings, while generous, did not give this kind of aid superfluously. Most of the recipients had children, or the recipient themselves were not in a condition to work or take care of themselves. This was consistent with the Quaker principle of charity of help to self-help and unity. The sickly and children, even in the eyes of parochial relief, were the deserving poor. It is, therefore, understandable that they would receive much of this kind of charity.

Some of the funds also went into buying things that constituted the basic needs. Pots, pans, shoes and coats were unlike food or medicine, which would be quickly consumed so that recipients would need another in a short period of time. These objects were meant to last the receiver for many years. The Quaker meetings were not willing to supply the able adult poor with their daily needs, but they would lend a hand for certain necessities, as long as they were enduring and would aid the recipients in their self-sustainability. Giving financial assistance to the able-bodied indicates a level of generosity that was not present in parochial relief. The inclusivity of the Friends community and the hope for unity accounts for such benevolence.

Apart from allowances and occasional relief, finding a way for the poor to work or sustain themselves, therefore, was one of the most essential missions of the monthly meetings. In Swarthmore, York and London, there was an apparent effort to accomplish this, whether by hiring the poor to work either for the meetings or individual members, or lending and donating money so they could start a livelihood.

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<sup>40</sup> LBM, p.1A.

One of the means of giving the poor employment was by giving them funds to begin their own business. A pensioner of the Swarthmore meeting, Agnes Holmes, was living in poverty at least starting in 1674, when the meeting gave her 3s towards her “necessity.”<sup>41</sup> In 1676, the meeting lent 4s 6d for her to buy wool and work as a spinster, stating explicitly that this was so she could work something towards a livelihood.<sup>42</sup> In 1677, she paid back the 4s 6d to the women’s meeting.<sup>43</sup> Her disappearance from the records of the meeting indicates that she was better off with this help.

In 1655, Mabel Gunson also received a loan of 5s from the women’s meeting to “encourage her in trade.”<sup>44</sup> She, however, did not seem to have had as much success as Agnes Holmes, and continued to be given money by the Swarthmore meeting on the account of being poor.<sup>45</sup> There are no records of Holmes having children, but it was certain that Gunson had three. That could be a reason why she continued to receive aid from the meeting after their initial loan, or why she could not fully participate in business due to her obligations in the domestic sphere.<sup>46</sup> Gunson’s case meant the approach of help towards self-help was not successful for all cases the meeting implemented.

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<sup>41</sup> SWMM, p.32.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Fell, *Account Book*, pp.410, 414.

<sup>44</sup> SWMM, p.34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.37, 42, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Mabel Gunson did finally leave the SWMM’s list of pensioners as she departed to Ireland in September of 1676 along with her three children.

The York meeting had a similar system of hiring the poor to do work for the meeting. An example was Jane Colton, who received aid from the meeting for her children. In 1675, the meeting paid her 10s for clothes washing. In the same way, the York women's meeting paid Margaret Wainwright for her work at the meeting three times, twice in 1677 for "going on an errand" and "working" and one in 1680 "for her trouble at the women's meetings, for washing friends' clothes."<sup>47</sup>

The London women had different records of giving the poor a sustainable livelihood. There are no records of the meeting hiring poor men and women to do chores at the meetinghouse. It is true that the meeting gave out numerous loans, but the purpose of these loans remained shrouded in mystery due to the lack of detail in the account books; therefore, while it is possible that they did so, there is no way to ascertain. There are, however, records of women patrons who donated sums of money specifying that they were for giving the poor a livelihood. It is apparent that the meeting was concerned for putting the poor to work and was supported by its members. This clearly exemplifies the Quaker goal of uniting the rich and poor through relief and giving charity so that the poor would be able to help themselves in the future.

Not only did Quaker women employ innovative schemes, but they were also selective in disbursing relief. Though to different extents, there were disproportionately more women among the recipients of the charity that operated out of Swarthmore, York and London women's meetings. The York women's account book holds 194 entries of disbursing relief between 1674 and 1681, of which 140 were given to women and 27 to men. Edward Colton, whose name was on 19 out of the 27 male entries, was only given aid for his children's tuition after his wife's

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<sup>47</sup> YWMM, pp.11, 12, 17.

death. Over eighty percent of aid from the women's meeting, therefore, went to women and children. The bias in favor of female recipients in York is easily explained – the men's monthly meeting was also active in poor relief and provided for the male Friends in need.<sup>48</sup>

The women's meeting at Swarthmore had the largest disparity between genders. Of 63 entries between 1674 and 1680, all but one were given to women. Christopher Harrison was the lone male recipient. Described as “a poor man,” Harrison received 2s “towards his necessity.”<sup>49</sup> There exists little evidence that suggests that the men's monthly meeting of Swarthmore was as active as that of York in disbursing aid. It concerned itself with other administrative matters and seemed to have left charity solely in the hands of women.<sup>50</sup> From where, then, did the poor men of Swarthmore receive aid? While it is possible that records of Swarthmore men disbursing poor relief did not survive, there is evidence of male Friends being given financial assistance by wealthy individuals. It is, therefore, plausible that wealthy families, such as the Fells, offered some support to the poor men of Swarthmore.

Margaret Fell and her daughters, especially Sarah, who handled the Swarthmore women's meeting stock, were active in providing for the poor outside of the meetings. The detailed personal account book of Sarah Fell allows the reconstruction of the charitable acts of the Fell household. The methods in which Sarah Fell aided the poor mirrored those of the meeting. Even with the small sample of loaners, Fell was noticeably stricter with men. She rarely specified a time period within which the loan had to be repaid for female borrowers. When she

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<sup>48</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>49</sup> SWMM, p.31.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter 3

lent 7s 6d to Greave's wife, she simply recorded the transaction.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, when Jane Colton borrowed 3s, Fell stated that Colton "[owed her] and she reckoned."<sup>52</sup> Men, however, were asked to return their loans within a specific period of time. A man named Miles Dodding, for example, borrowed £30 for a period of ten days.<sup>53</sup> While £30 is a large sum of money, it was not the reason behind Fell's rigidity. Another male Friend, George Fell, had borrowed only 5s, but was asked to pay it back within two weeks.<sup>54</sup>

While it is appealing to construe this difference to gender, one must also keep in mind that there were also male loaners whose loans did not have time constraints.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that Fell knew her recipients personally and realized she needed to be stricter with some than others. Another explanation is that Dodding and George Fell were not impoverished and borrowed money for reasons other than their necessity. She was, consequently, not as generous with them as she was with other male loaners. Since there are no details on the personal lives of these men, it is difficult to determine their economic statuses. The generosity of the Fells that extended beyond the meeting's collection mirrors that of the benefactors of the London Box Meeting and demonstrates the effort of the wealthy to provide for the poor – a statement in unity of the community.

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<sup>51</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account Book*, p.103.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.281.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account Book*, p.9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.68, 266.

The records of the London Box Meeting's account book deviate from the norm. Out of 139 entries, 76 were given to women, 53 to men and 7 to both sexes. The London meeting clearly gave to more men than the other two. This anomaly is easily clarified – the Box Meeting was the main administrator of Quaker charity in London. It was sometimes given additional funds from men's meetings, almost as an act of entrusting poor men with the Box Meeting. It is therefore not surprising that a larger number of its recipients were male. Considering these facts, however, it is even more remarkable that the number of female recipients is 40 percent higher than that of the male.

Recipients:	Swarthmore	York	London
Male	1	27	53
Female	63	140	76
Both	0	0	7
Unknown <sup>56</sup>	0	27	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>139</b>

Table 2.2: Gender breakdown of recipients of women's meetings

There seems to be no explicit theological explanation, but a likely socio-economic one, for the disproportionate number of female recipients. The establishment of separate women's meetings, however, was largely based on the argument that women would be more prolific in providing for their own sex.<sup>57</sup> This, however, implies that the men would assume care of their poor; and it has been demonstrated that this was not the case. It is also unlikely that there was such a large inequality in number of poor women and men in all of England. It must therefore be the selective nature of those providing aid. Was it because women and widows were seen as more "deserving" than poor men? This mindset was present in the Elizabethan poor laws and

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<sup>56</sup> Unknown recipients were either referred to by their initials or as "a poor Friend."

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 1



administrators of parochial relief. Indeed, scholars have found that women were overrepresented among pensioners of the parishes.<sup>58</sup> Women, especially widows and those of old age, evoked more sympathy from both Quaker and parochial overseers, as they had far less employment opportunities than their male counterparts.

While women were generally seen as the deserving poor, the Quakers also altered the definition of “deserving” to fit their religious worldviews. Good behavior and expression of gratitude were important criteria for those seeking assistance from the women’s meetings. The dearth of detail in the minute book of the York meeting engenders difficulties in determining whether they turned poor Friends away on the basis of misconduct. The account book of the London Box Meeting also does not offer much detail of the background of the receivers. It is, however, evident that the meeting did not give second loans to those who did not repay their first. Returning borrowed funds can be classified as good conduct of ethics and honesty. The strict practice of not extending overlapping loans was sensible both in financial and disciplinary terms.

Thanks to the meticulous records in the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meeting minute book, an abundance of evidence is available regarding discriminatory aid due to the behavior of the recipients. An example of a Friend with good conduct was Jane Strickland, a poor widow with five children who had recently joined the meeting.<sup>59</sup> Two women were asked to keep “a

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<sup>58</sup> Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Live-Cycle Under the English Poor Law* (Croydon, 2011), p.12; Paul A. Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.113-114.

<sup>59</sup> SWMM, p.50.

wise and careful eye over her, to see that she make good use of Friends love and charity.”<sup>60</sup> In the subsequent meeting, it was reported that Strickland “had used the supply gratefully” and that “she [was] worthy of care and love, [was] diligent and working towards a livelihood, which [was] commendable...Friends will assist her if she needed it in the future.”<sup>61</sup> The meeting stayed true to its words and often sent her supplies from the stock.<sup>62</sup> It was not, however, overtly generous. After having sent her a sum of money and realizing that she was still in need, the meeting asked those who had not already contributed to “send her what everyone [found] themselves free to give.”<sup>63</sup> The case of Strickland also illustrates that the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meeting was extremely mindful of its stock, taking care not to spend it too much on one recipient, even when she was a pious widow with multiple children.

Margaret Geldart, on the other hand, represented Friends who had conducted themselves poorly in the eyes of the meeting. She was said to be “out of heath and hath been for some time.” The meeting, however, was informed, “she hath some household goods of her own or something that she may make money of, to supply her necessity with, but out of a covetous mind seems unwilling to.” It assigned two women to investigate the matter and determine if she was “worthy.”<sup>64</sup> The following month, the appointed members reported that Geldart did in fact have possessions of her own, and the meeting refused to give her any assistance from its stock.

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<sup>60</sup> SWMM., p.51.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.56, 57.

<sup>63</sup> SWMM, p.65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p.61.

Geldart's case illustrates that the meeting did not take the matter of charity lightly. It also demonstrates the decision process that went into handing out a grant. They did not simply give aid to any Friend who seemed to be in a strenuous situation. The meeting took the time to ascertain that the individual was in actual need. While this seems as though it should be standard procedure in all cases of poor relief, holding on to worldly possessions directly conflicts with the Christian, and specifically Quaker values. An epistle from the London Yearly Meeting in 1696 clearly articulates, "Take the apostle's advice and not be high-minded, but fear and trust not in certain riches, but be rich in good works, willing to communicate, ready to distribute."<sup>65</sup> In addition to dishonesty, "covetously" refusing to give up her own assets, and having the audacity to ask for assistance from the meeting was a direct offense to the value of simplicity and unselfishness. Geldart was, therefore, denied assistance not only for practical, but also for religious reasons.

Another example of a troublesome pensioner was Ann Birkett. She was described as "poor," "out of health," and "at want of supply," and had received multiple donations from the meeting.<sup>66</sup> In December 1677, however, the minutes state that she "hath let up a cross spirit of prejudice against Friends without a cause."<sup>67</sup> The meeting could not, however, "see her in such great want as to suffer for want of food" and decided to give her a small sum of money. This was done with the hopes "to cast out that cross wicked spirit...and come to that [the meeting] can

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<sup>65</sup> Fry, *An Alphabetical Extract*, p.77.

<sup>66</sup> SWMM, pp.28,32,42.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

distribute to her necessity in love and that she may receive in the same.”<sup>68</sup> In the following year, Birkett asked to take out a loan from the meeting stock. Her request was declined, as she did not give an adequate account of its purpose. She also remained “a cross, stubborn spirit and [rejected the meeting’s] care over her.”<sup>69</sup> The Swarthmore women therefore concluded that they did not “find her worthy of Friends’ love” and that “nothing can be done for her at present, but [they desired] that she may come out of this wicked, envious spirit which will be her own hurt.”<sup>70</sup>

An opposite of Jane Strickland, Birkett showed no gratitude for the assistance of the meeting. Unlike Margaret Geldart, Birkett was in real need of assistance, but the meeting was disciplined enough to turn away a penurious Friend due to her misconduct. Her case illustrates the compassion of the meeting for the poor: the Swarthmore women gave her the first sum of money despite her “cross and evil spirit,” as they could not bear to see her starve. This same compassion was not shown to Geldart, who had a means of relieving herself of her predicament. The meeting was evidently willing to offer her a chance to overturn her hostility. When she refused, however, they discontinued that kindness. The meeting’s tolerance had a limit and they were holding Birkett as firmly to the rules as they did Geldart. While it may seem that the meeting was using charity as a disciplinary measure, one must keep in mind that the meeting actually benefitted from having one less pensioner. Birkett’s animosity was “her own hurt,” as the meeting was unwilling to assist her in such state. It is clear that the Swarthmore women truly wished she would change, so that they could assume their “care for her.”

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>70</sup> SWMM, p.64.

As is apparent in the case of Geldart, the Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting did not take information for granted, but conducted inquiries to ensure its veracity. The meeting was not afraid to dismiss claims that they found to be false. Agnes Braithwate, for example, was a regular recipient of the meeting, as her husband was in prison.<sup>71</sup> In 1677, the meeting asked if she "hath concealed, or privately made away any goods."<sup>72</sup> An inquiry was made, during which aid was put on hold. In the following month, the meeting found that the accusations were false and resumed giving her financial assistance.

In all cases, the meeting focused on determining whether the recipient was "worthy" of its care and assistance. There is a connotation of the poor having to earn support from the meetings by expressing their gratitude and behaving appropriately. It shifts the responsibility from the meeting having to judge if a Friend was "deserving" to the Friend having to prove herself "worthy" of the meeting's aid. If an individual was deemed unworthy, it was her own fault, due to her own misconduct. While the meeting desired to help the poor, the latter also had to do their part and earn the support. This treatment of the poor, albeit demanding, exhibits the notion that they were an integrated part of the Society of Friends. As fellow Quakers, they were expected to uphold good moral standing, and failure to do so did not only deny them aid, but also a place in the community. This practice underscores the close relation between unity in the Society of Friends and charity. It is also remarkable that these women were able to effectively and efficiently to determine the conditions of recipients. They showed compassion, but did not bend the rules for any pensioner, whether for good or bad conduct. This practice of the

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<sup>71</sup> SWMM, p.72.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting demonstrates a sense of organization, discipline and expertise that was in the seventeenth century usually associated with men.

Apart from relieving poor Friends, Quaker women's meetings also assumed care of poor children and orphans, placing them as servants in Friend's house and paying for their education. As the London Box Meeting account book only contains its financial transactions, one can only infer the measures the meeting took in regards to children, but there are multiple occasions in which the meeting gathered "besides collection" for children of poor Friends. These were usually between £8 and £10, significantly higher than the average donation of £8.<sup>73</sup> There is also evidence of presenting a child with monthly wages, and giving another payment for his "service."<sup>74</sup> Clearly, the meeting hired poor children, both boys and girls, to work and paid them small wages.

Similarly, the York Women's Monthly Meeting minutes placed a young girl in the house of a Quaker woman to work. The meeting, not the homeowner, paid her a wage of 1s6d per week.<sup>75</sup> This demonstrates that the York meeting was not willing to burden its members with the payments of a child servant. Instead, it assumed the responsibility for both the child and his or her livelihood. Other records regarding children in the York minute book involve giving parents sums of money for "children's schooling," such as those to Susannah Bolton.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> LBM, pp.33, 38, 54B.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1, 26A.

<sup>75</sup> YWMM, p.10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.4, 17.

The women's meeting with the most detailed account of its care for children is that of Swarthmore. A twelve-year-old girl, Isabel Colton, was previously a servant to a female Friend named Elizabeth. In February 1678, the Swarthmore meeting was informed that she was no longer wanted at Elizabeth's house, and was then in need of employment.<sup>77</sup> Four months later, a Friend named Barbara Kirkby took Colton in as a servant. She promised to "teach her business and keep her in good order." The meeting paid her an annual wage of 8s.<sup>78</sup>

Kirkby's affirmation to care for Colton while offering her a livelihood illustrates the duties and qualities of a patron that the Swarthmore women were looking for. Not only did they insist on Quakers, the guardian must also have good influence on the child. This is demonstrated by case of Mary Benson, a young orphan for whom the meeting assumed responsibilities. She had a great uncle, Anthony Strickland who had offered to take care of her. The meeting had reservations about sending Benson to her uncle, as "we do not know whether it may be safe or no to send her to him, being no Friend, least he should train up the child in vanity and folly. Therefore we are more free to continue our supply for her maintenance."<sup>79</sup> The meeting's care and sense of responsibility for Mary Benson is demonstrated, as it chose to keep her as a financial liability rather than risk placing her in the hands of an unfit guardian.

Benson was eventually sent to her great uncle, "and he and his wife received her lovingly and kindly."<sup>80</sup> After a few months, however, he was no longer able to care for his great niece and

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<sup>77</sup> SWMM, p.60.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

she was placed in the care of the meeting once again.<sup>81</sup> It found her a temporary home with a female Friend, Elizabeth Birkett. The meeting continued to play an important part in Benson's life. It reimbursed Birkett from the stock when she bought the child a new pair of shoes.<sup>82</sup> Benson was later sent to live with James Taylor, at whose house many monthly meetings were held. She worked as a servant and was given an annual wage of £2.<sup>83</sup>

It was estimated that Benson was orphaned when she was either eight or nine.<sup>84</sup> She was taken care of for some time, but was put to work when she was old enough. The minimum age of employing a child seemed to be around ten years old. Isabel Colton was also 12 years old when the women's meeting found her a place to work.

Women's meetings' handling of children was analogous to that of the parishes. Beginning in 1547, overseers were required to find apprenticeships for poor children. It is likely that the Friends were influenced by parochial relief in regards to children, as they were with the distinction between deserving and non-deserving poor. Placing them in homes of Friends not only ensured proper upbringing as Quakers, but it also kept them from being idle. The scheme was designed to accustom children to working and for them to be able to support themselves. Paying for poor children's education was also a worthwhile investment for the York women's meetings, as it ensured at least some form of livelihood for them in the future. All of these

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<sup>81</sup> SWMM, p.93.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.93,95.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>84</sup> Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, p.95.



schemes regarding children were in alignment with the Quaker purposes of charity – the help to self-help.

Similar to parochial relief, the women Friends treated the able-bodied different from the elderly and children. While relieving the impotent, they sought ways to find employment for those who had the capacity to work. Yet, there were still times in which these women meeting showed exceptional compassion to their recipients, loaning adults funds and even giving assistance to those they deemed unworthy. This generosity proceeded from the Quaker concept of unity between the rich and poor, and the effort to include the latter into their communities as much as possible.

### Chapter 3: Men's and women's meetings

“All stand steadfast in Christ Jesus, your head; in whom you are all one, male and female,” stated an epistle from George Fox to the London Yearly Meeting in 1691.<sup>1</sup> This extract reiterates the Quaker perception of unity between men and women in Christ. This perception was translated into the works of the men and women's meetings that, while different, all served God's purpose in one way or another. To understand the central role of women's charity in the community, one must understand the men's contribution to poor relief, as well as the duties of both meetings. Swarthmore and York Men's Monthly Meetings are useful points of comparisons to establish the jurisdictions of the men and women's meetings.

Both men and women's meetings were involved in rectifying inappropriate behavior of their members. Keeping its members from paying tithes was the top priority for the Swarthmore meeting. A tithe was one-tenth of one's annual income or yield that was paid to the church. While the refusal to pay tithes was not unique to the Society of Friends, their justification for it was deeply rooted in their theology. Quakers believe that the biblical Old Covenant was flawed and needed alteration. Christ brought this amendment in the form of the New Covenant. Collecting tithes was a practice of the old order of Priests, and therefore incongruous with the New Covenant. Many Friends were imprisoned for refusing to pay tithes and fines regarding the non-payments of tithes.<sup>2</sup> On multiple occasions, the Swarthmore meeting condemned its

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<sup>1</sup> *A Collection of epistles*, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry*, pp. 35-36; for further explanation on tithes and Quaker theology regarding tithes, see George Fox, “A clear distinction between the Old Covenant, or Old Testament, and the New Covenant, or Testament” in *Gospel truth demonstrated in a Collection of Doctrinal Books, given forth by that Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ* (London, 1708), pp.746-776.

members for doing so.<sup>3</sup> This behavior, however, was not limited to men. In January 1672, the meeting denounced a woman named Mabel Briton for paying tithes. It concluded that her husband and other Friends should speak to her on the matter and report back the next time the meeting convened.<sup>4</sup> Quakers' reproach for tithes persisted throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth. An epistle from the London Yearly Meeting in 1706 advised Friends to "stand faithful in their testimony against tithes, priest maintenance and church-rates."<sup>5</sup>

The women's meeting of Swarthmore also took disciplinary measure against their members. In 1675, for example, the meeting assigned two Friends to speak to a woman on the account that she was living with another man out of wedlock. The meeting desired her to "be kept clear from scandal and reproach as much as possible."<sup>6</sup> On another occasion, it found that Janet Harrison had grown negligent and failed to attend meetings.<sup>7</sup> It asked her neighbors to ensure that she was present at the next session.<sup>8</sup> The women's meeting also condemned a woman named Hester Cooper for selling ale.<sup>9</sup> The Quakers, though successful in business, were advocates of simplicity. An epistle in 1692 from the London Yearly Meeting, for example, called for Friends in act "in sobriety, modesty, and plainness in apparel, language and conversation, as

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<sup>3</sup> SMMM, p.34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>5</sup> Fry, *An alphabetical extract*, p.52.

<sup>6</sup> SWMM, p.37.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>9</sup> SWMM, p.96.

becometh our holy profession and Christian religion.”<sup>10</sup> Cooper’s ale business was seen as an act of extravagance, profiting from unnecessary commodity. The women’s meeting, therefore, concluded that “a paper must be written against her and her evil practices and made public.”<sup>11</sup> Papers of condemnation were either submitted to each meeting by a member, or drafted by the session itself to express disapproval of an individual. As exemplified in Cooper’s case, these papers were public, as a means to alert the community of her transgression.

The presence of disciplinary actions in the women’s meeting raises a question regarding the case of Mabel Briton. Why was her offense brought to the men’s meeting if she belonged to that of the women? One must closer examine the differences in the nature of her offense. The case of Janet Harrison’s absence from the meetings indisputably belonged to the women. She was one of their members and their duty was to warrant her participation. An unmarried couple living together was a familial and marriage issue, to which the women’s meeting must tend. One must also note that the meeting approached the woman, not the couple. While there is no corresponding evidence, it is possible that the men’s meetings also approached the man for the same issue. Cooper’s offense, while concerned business, was still handled by the women’s meeting because she was one of its members.

While the women’s meeting occasionally expressed their contempt towards paying tithes, the men were far more vocal on the issue.<sup>12</sup> This matter was even reiterated in the 1676 epistle of the London Yearly Meeting, which was sent to every Quaker meeting in Britain. The Yearly

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<sup>10</sup> A collection of the epistles, p.49.

<sup>11</sup> SWMM, p.85.

<sup>12</sup> SWMM, pp.35, 81.

Meeting advised “that all Friends have a care that they neither openly or secretly consent to the taking away of their tithes, nor to the payment of them by any one whatsoever on their behalf; but keep faithful to their testimony.”<sup>13</sup> The seriousness in which Friends took to their testimonies against tithes was likely the reason why Briton’s case was handed over to the men’s meeting. She disobeyed the directions regarding an issue about which all Quakers during her time were adamant, and her crime was consequently seen as more serious than others. This severity resulted in her cases being handled by the men’s meeting.

The York men’s meeting had a broader scope of disciplinary measures. In 1672, for example, the meeting issued a paper of condemnation to Andrew Thompson for his “wicked behavior”.<sup>14</sup> Another man even confessed to a drinking problem and asked for assistance at the meeting.<sup>15</sup> The York men’s meetings also took actions against women. A paper of condemnation for a woman named Elizabeth Sill, for example, was put forth in the meeting in June 1675.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike its counterpart in Swarthmore, the minutes of the York women’s meeting contain no evidence of disciplinary actions. The dearth of detail and explanations in the women’s meeting minutes could easily account for the missing data. It was possible that the women of York did not record the measure they took against disobedient members. It was also possible, albeit unlikely, that the York men’s meeting simply took over the punitive authority of the women’s meeting.

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<sup>13</sup> *A collection of epistles*, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> YMMM, p.20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>16</sup> YMMM, p.47.

Another shared responsibility of the men and women's meetings was approving marriages. The Quakers were concerned with the sanctity of marriage between Friends. They had to confirm that neither party had undisclosed prior marriages, engagements or children, and that they were both in good moral standing.<sup>17</sup> The York Men Meeting Minutes state clearly that intentions of marriages have to be declared at both "the men and women's monthly meeting twice, except on occasions extraordinary be shown, and the meetings both assent to it that things may be done in clearness and unity."<sup>18</sup> Swarthmore and York men and women's meetings managed declarations of marriage intentions, approving and declining marriages. Sometimes the papers indicating the intention of marriage in the meeting minutes were included in the meeting minutes.<sup>19</sup> This management included the Swarthmore men assigning Friends to investigate into the behavior of a woman named Isabel Byson to ascertain if she was fit to become a wife. In the next monthly meeting, the Friends reported that she was "clear" and allowed her to proceed with her marriage.<sup>20</sup> One another occasion, the Swarthmore women's meeting had reservations about a marriage in which the bride was the groom's servant. It finally allowed them to marry after months of deliberation.<sup>21</sup> The meetings did not approve all marriages. In January of 1674, a paper

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<sup>17</sup> Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, p.162.

<sup>18</sup> YMMM, p.67.

<sup>19</sup> SMMM, p.19.

<sup>20</sup> SMMM, p.53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.76-79.

of condemnation was put forth in the men's meetings concerning a Friend who took "a woman of the worth contrary to truth and order" as his wife.<sup>22</sup>

Men and women's meetings both settled disputes among the members. The Swarthmore men's meeting, for example, expressed their dissatisfaction for the "anger" between Rich Brian and John Barrow. It ordered them both to attend the next monthly meeting to sort out their resentment.<sup>23</sup> The meeting also handled disputes that involved women. The most prominent example is the differences between Thomas Rawlinson and Margaret Fell. Rawlinson worked for Fell and her daughters at Force Forge, an iron bloomery. Rawlinson accused the Fells of not compensating him properly, and that they falsified the account books of the bloomery. The Fells, on the other hand, claimed that Rawlinson stole from them as well as discharging unnecessary expenses from the Force Forge account. The case was handled by the Cartmell preparatory meeting, which referred it to the Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting. The Lancashire quarterly meeting finally had to step in to arbitrate the dispute.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, there were several occasions in which the York Men's Meeting had to settle differences between Friends.<sup>25</sup> These differences also include monetary issues. In 1678, for

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<sup>22</sup> SMMM., p.83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, pp.103-104; For more information on the altercation, Rawlinson and his papers against the Fells, see William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, ed. Henry J. Cadbury (Cambridge, 1955, orig. 1912), 456; Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism* (London, 1949), 267-268; Thomas Rawlinson, *[A book to] goe abroad onely among all Friends i[n] th[e] Truth [in answer] to seuerall papers of Margret Foxe...formerly called Margret Fell...toucheing the unjust orders, papers, and illegale proceedings on her behalfe...as toucheing my Stewardship for her...at Forse Fordge* (1680).

<sup>25</sup> YMMM, pp.58, 64.

example, they desired “to speak with Rich Powell about his disorders as also to the paying of a debt due to William Yarbrough.”<sup>26</sup> This issue bears a resemblance to one that was brought to the Swarthmore women’s meeting in 1675. It sent a letter to the women’s meeting at Kendall regarding a man named Anthony Shaw. His father, Robert, owed Jane Hudson £3. Hudson was formerly a member of the Kendall meeting, and recently moved to Swarthmore. She had complained to the Swarthmore meeting that she “could not get it off him.” The meeting then asked the Kendall women to procure the funds on her behalf.<sup>27</sup>

There is a clear divide between the genders in terms of settling disputes. While both the Rawlinson and Hudson cases involved men and women, the meeting that supervised the dispute was that of the plaintiff. Naturally, a man in distress would go to his monthly meeting over the women’s, as a woman would hers. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the women’s meetings took care of Hudson, while the men’s managed the case of Rawlinson.

While the women’s meetings were the main administrators of charity, the men’s meetings were also involved in the process. Men’s contribution to poor relief was common in the time period, as parochial overseers of the poor were mostly men. The practical purpose of men’s participation was clear. For Swarthmore and York, the women’s meetings mostly tended to women, widows and children. Male recipients were present, but they were few and far between. The men’s meetings, therefore, needed to assist male Quakers who were in need. The gender disparity is easily discernible, especially between the York men’s and women’s meetings.

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<sup>26</sup> YMMM., p.82.

<sup>27</sup> SWMM, p.39.



The York women's account book holds 194 entries of disbursing charity between 1674 and 1681, of which 140 were to women and 27 to men. Edward Colton, whose name was on 19 out of the 27 male entries, was not himself the recipient: he was only given aid for his children's tuition after his wife's death.<sup>28</sup> Over eighty percent of aid from the women's meeting, therefore, was for women and children. Between 1670 and 1681, the men's meeting had a total of 93 entries of charity, out of which 74 were designated to men. Similarly, eighty percent of the men's aid was given to members of their own sex.

Gender:	Women's meetings	Men's Meetings
Male recipients	27	74
Female recipients	149	18
Both male and female recipients	0	1
Unknown <sup>29</sup>	27	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>93</b>

Table 3.1 Gender breakdown of the York Men's and Women's Monthly Meetings

In order for the meetings to disburse charity, they needed a source of funding. Like the women, the York Men's Monthly Meeting collected money from its members each time it convened. Like some of the women's meetings, the York meeting had five smaller meetings – York, Tadcaster, Selby Skipwith and Whixley. Most of the time, all five meetings contributed to the collections, but there were some months in which one meeting was missing. The regular collections are unsurprising, as the meeting consistently aided its poor members. Collections brought into the York meeting amounted to an average of £2 15s and 9d, higher than that of the

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>29</sup> Unknown recipients were either referred to by their initials or as “a poor friend.”

York and the Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meetings, but still lower than that of the London Box Meeting. The Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting, on the other hand, was not as active in individual charity. Most of its funds were directed towards public use.<sup>30</sup> While the term "public use" could be for uses of the poor, there is no clear evidence to support the conjecture. Explicit evidence of the meeting occasionally accepting collections for the poor was, however, present in the men's minutes.

While the women's meetings often employed loans as part of relief distribution, loans were not as prominent for the men. The Swarthmore men's meeting produced no record of loans; there are two cases of loans from its York counterpart. In 1678 a man borrowed £2 and was meant to "pay again when he [was] able."<sup>31</sup> There are no records of him returning the loan. Another man borrowed money twice. His first loan of £1 10s was in 1674, which he paid back in 1675.<sup>32</sup> He took out a second loan of £3 in 1676, and there are no further records of him in the account book.<sup>33</sup> The dearth of loans in the records of the Swarthmore meeting is expected, as it did not regularly provide relief of any sort. While the York men's meeting did give monthly aid to the poor, its disinclination towards loans echoed that of its female counterparts.<sup>34</sup>

While there are no records of the York men's meeting giving allowances to any of its dependants, the Swarthmore Men's Monthly Meeting gave to the "maintenance" of "Old Jane

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<sup>30</sup> Kunze, *Margaret Fell*, p.162.

<sup>31</sup> YMMM, p.75.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.36, 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>34</sup> See chapter 2

Woodell” in more than one occasion.<sup>35</sup> These were contributions to the “collection” for Woodell, which was managed by the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meeting, and were clearly out of the ordinary for the men’s meeting. Woodell passed away in 1678, and her aid from the men’s meeting had begun in 1674.<sup>36</sup> She was clearly elderly and unable to work, a prime example of the deserving poor. An explanation for the aid from the men’s meeting could be that it only assisted those who were genuinely and exceedingly in need. Woodell, however, was not the only poor, aged widow in Swarthmore. Why, then, would the men’s meeting would only single her out of all the other deserving poor? A plausible explanation is that Woodell required a much higher amount of funding than the rest. She was the only recipient of the Swarthmore Women’s Monthly Meeting who was given relief in all three methods apart from employment.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that the women’s meeting simply needed assistance in supporting her. In a letter from George Fox to “all Friends,” he requested all women’s meetings “to help the poor...and that which they cannot do in such causes, they may inform the men.”<sup>38</sup> The men’s meeting is simply adhering to their duty of aiding the women’s meeting where necessary.

A method of distributing aid that was present in both women and men’s meetings was relief for specific purposes. The York men’s meeting gave a man 10s in 1672 for “the relief of his child.”<sup>39</sup> Another was given 17s the year prior for “his son apprentice.”<sup>40</sup> Apart from children,

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<sup>35</sup> SMMM, pp.85, 87, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account Book*, p.525.

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>38</sup> SWMM, p.99.

<sup>39</sup> YMMM, p.13.

the meeting also aided those in need of financial assistance for voyages. In 1673, Benjamin Brown, a member of the meeting, was given £2 10s as “supply of going to Scotland.”<sup>41</sup> Brown was a poor member of the York community, and also received 4s “for his necessities” a year after.<sup>42</sup>

There are two instances in which the Swarthmore Men’s Monthly Meeting contributed to aid for specific purposes. One was for a man named Thomas Holm for “the maintenance of his apparel” in 1671.<sup>43</sup> The other was in collaboration with the women’s meeting for buying a cow for Ellen Braithwaite of Cartmell. An issue was raised in the women’s meeting in regards to Braithwaite’s behavior: she “hath walked disorderly.” Men and women of Cartmell were subsequently ordered to “examine and search out the transgression of all bands and to bring the transgress to judgment.”<sup>44</sup> She would only receive the fund if they saw that she was deserving of assistance. In the next meeting, it was reported to the women’s meeting that Braithwaite’s behavior was appropriate, and a sum of 10s was given for her purchase of the cow.<sup>45</sup> The case of Braithwaite sheds light on an aspect of the men’s perception of charity. Like women, the men’s meeting also gave discriminatory aid not only in terms of the recipient’s ability to support herself, but also in terms of piety and discipline.

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<sup>40</sup> YMMM., p.9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.; This sum of money was later reimbursed to the monthly meeting by the Quarterly meeting.

<sup>42</sup> YMMM, p.38.

<sup>43</sup> SMMM, p.55.

<sup>44</sup> SWMM, p.40.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

While neither the Swarthmore nor the York Men's Monthly Meetings hired poor members to work, their contribution to charity demonstrated the same value as the women: they gave aid for long-term purposes that would last the recipients a significant amount of time, and potentially give them financial independence. A cow could supply a family with dairy products and significantly decrease spending on food. The benefits of an apprenticeship were quite apparent – it would eventually give the boy a livelihood.

While there were similarities in the responsibilities of the men and women's meetings, several tasks were handled exclusively by men. They solely handled administrative and commercial matters. Even in the progressive community of the Quakers, women did not participated in businesses. Women's exclusion from trade underscores the notion that their freedom in the Society of Friends was purely religious. They could write, preach and help the poor, as these were all works of God. Outside the church Quaker women were no different from their contemporaries and were still not part of the professional sphere.

Another point of comparison for the women's meetings is with the London Six Weeks Meeting. Attended by both women and men, the agendas of the meeting reflect the gender composition of its members. The "feminine" aspect of the meeting revolved around charity, such as employing women as spinners and managing donations to the poor.<sup>46</sup> It also initiated and oversaw the construction of a school for the children of poor Friends.<sup>47</sup> The women's meetings would pay for their tuition and to "send as many poor Friend children to the school as they [saw]

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<sup>46</sup> LSWM, 76.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

cause.”<sup>48</sup> Both men and women’s meetings were to raise money quarterly to pay for the master of the school, whom the women’s meeting appointed to “keep the said school skilled in Latin, writing and arithmetic.”<sup>49</sup> This was truly remarkable for seventeenth century women and spoke to Quaker women’s abilities. In the seventeenth century, Latin was the language of instruction in the universities, and in which most religious texts were written. If women were to appoint a schoolmaster who was well versed in the language, they must have been competent to judge his expertise. This also underscores the close relationship of religion and Quaker women’s freedom – they must be able to read and write in Latin, the religious language of the time. The charitable schemes of the Six Weeks Meeting embody the same Quaker principles of “help to self-help.” Both employment and education both could lead to financial independence for the recipients.

Other works of the London Six Weeks Meeting were similar to those of the men’s. It settled differences between Friends of both gender, transcribed the purchase of burial grounds, and oversaw printing matters.<sup>50</sup> The meeting also had the power to defer marriages, an authority which belonged to both men and women’s meetings. The nature of the projects of the Six Weeks Meeting again emphasizes the difference between the women and men’s meetings. Each sex had its own responsibilities and these duties were attached to the members regardless of the setting. The women continued to be nurturers and the men remained in charge of administrative matters of the Society.

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<sup>48</sup> LSWM., p.21

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19,21

<sup>50</sup> LSWM., pp.2,6,7.

The London Six Weeks Meeting's activities also demonstrate how the virtues of both genders worked together in fruitful charity. It is notable that the meeting's philanthropic projects were on a much larger scale than those of the women's meetings. The Swarthmore Women's Monthly Meeting hired Jane Fisher, a poor widow, to work in the meetinghouse and the London Box Meeting managed donations towards hiring spinners. Each donation made to the Box Meeting was no more than £10, and all were all from female benefactors.<sup>51</sup> Donations to the London Six Weeks Meetings, however, were between £50 and £100 and were from both men and women.<sup>52</sup> With the larger fund, the meeting hired more spinners and required a more rigorous management of wages and supplies. Several members were appointed to supervise these matters, and the logistics of the scheme had to be discussed at length.<sup>53</sup> These issues are not present in the records of the women's meetings.

The construction of a school was also a large-scale project that was not present in any of the monthly meetings. The project was proposed in 1674 and remained at the forefront of the meeting's agenda for several years.<sup>54</sup> These substantial tasks also combined aspects of both genders. They were charitable and centered around women and children; however, they could also be seen as an investment, which were predominantly associated with men. Employment and education were also public affairs, which were usually handled by the men's meetings. While the two sexes contributed to different aspects of these large-scale charitable plans, the combination

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<sup>51</sup> LBM, pp.2, 12A.

<sup>52</sup> LSWM, pp.50, 115, 121.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.50, 83.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19, 45.

of both genders made the entire procedure possible. The London Six Weeks Meeting was an embodiment of the unity that George Fox had in mind. It drew on the ideal virtues, responsibilities and resources of both men and women, and combined them to create wide-reaching projects for the community.



## Conclusion

“It is advised...that all poor Friends among us be taken due care of, and that none of them be sent elsewhere for relief, according to Friends ancient care and practice.”<sup>1</sup> This extract from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 1721 epistle represents many from colonial America, where charity was also at the forefront of the Quaker agenda. One cannot overlook the fact that British Friends were a part of a larger transatlantic community. An exploration of the women’s meetings, collaborations between women and men and the works of Friends in the American colonies is essential to understanding women’s role in the community as a whole.

Two important events spurred the migration of Friends to the New World. Since the revocation of the Declaration of Indulgence in 1674, Quakers faced religious prosecution in Britain, culminating in the closing of the London meetinghouse in 1681. In the same year, William Penn was granted Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> The promise of religious freedom in the New World appealed to many. Early on in their migration, Quakers faced similar problems to those of other settlers. Immigrants died and families were separated during transport, leaving widows and orphans in need of much assistance.<sup>3</sup> The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting advised that the Quakers practiced “charity one towards another, and to all men; for besides those commendations given

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<sup>1</sup> T. Ellwood Zell, ed., *Early Quakerism; Being Extracts from the Records of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the Meetings Composing it* (Philadelphia, 1860), p.215.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Townsend, *Chronology of the Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, 1895), pp.16,25-26.

<sup>3</sup> James, *A People Among Peoples*, p.46.

to charity by the Apostles...charity preventeth many evils. It keeps the peace, preserves unity, and, as it were, teaches all duty.”<sup>4</sup>

This extract illustrates an identical perception of charity between Friends the colonies and those in England. While the apostles of their faith commanded helping the poor, the Quakers realized its practical benefits to the community. One of the most important purposes of charity was unity. The poor were an integral part of the community and Quakers realized that relief was an effective and important means to unify the Society of Friends. The other important component to unity was women, who were needed for the restoration in God’s kingdom.

Some of the earliest records of American women’s meeting minutes belong to those of Darby and Philadelphia. Darby women and men’s monthly meeting minutes both survive from 1684, only four years after the granting of Pennsylvania to Penn. Comparable to their York counterparts, a combination of the two offers opportunities of comparison for a better understanding of the duties of men and women. Beginning in 1686, the Philadelphia Women’s Monthly Meeting minutes bear great detail, especially on preaching and poor relief.<sup>5</sup> The minutes also contain epistles from England, demonstrating orderly communication between Quakers of the two worlds.

Epistles from London to the colonial men’s meetings instructed that they “[encouraged] the faithful women’s meetings and settling them where they [were] wanting.”<sup>6</sup> Like Fox, Penn was also supportive of separate meetings for women:

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<sup>4</sup> Zell, *Early Quakerism*, p.152.

<sup>5</sup> James, *A People Among peoples*, p.340.

<sup>6</sup> DMMM, p.344.

“But it is asked why should women meet apart? We think for a very good reason. The church increaseth, which increaseth the business of the church, and women, whose bashfulness will not permit them to say or do much, as to church affairs before men, when by themselves, may exercise their gift of wisdom and understanding, in a direct care of their own sex, at least, which makes up not the least part of the business of the church, and this, while the men are about their own proper business, also, as men and women make up the church, men and women make up the business of the church.”<sup>7</sup>

Penn’s focus on the issue of separate women’s meeting highlighted its practicality. Not only would women be more productive in their own company, but the church would also be able to utilize the other half of its population to a greater extent. With support from the men, colonial women’s meetings were thus quickly founded.

Quaker women in the New World carefully followed instructions from epistles sent to them from George Fox in setting up their meetings. Each monthly meeting consisted of smaller preparative ones and was mainly in charge of approving marriages, keeping members in good conduct and attending to the needs of the poor.<sup>8</sup> The process of marriage authorization in the colonies was the same as that in Britain. A couple would declare the intention of marriage to both men and women at two consecutive monthly meetings.<sup>9</sup> Each meeting would appoint members to investigate the “cleanness” of the couple. If the meeting “found nothing to the

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<sup>7</sup> William Penn, *Just Measures* (London, 1602) p.8 via Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: the Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco, 1986), pp.50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, pp.3-5.

<sup>9</sup> DWMM, p.1.

contrary but that they [were] clear from all others,” it would “[leave] them to proceed to marriage according to truth and good order.”<sup>10</sup>

There are records of the Darby meeting dealing with disciplinary issues of their members. It sent two women to speak to Ann Kirk, for instance, in regard to reports of her misconduct.<sup>11</sup> After several attempts to settle its differences with her, the meeting finally decided that “it [was] Ann Kirk’s own business to clear herself from the report that [was] upon her, till which time this meeting [could] not have unity with her.”<sup>12</sup> Kirk continued to pose a problem to the Darby meeting well into the 1720s.<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, conflicting evidence regarding the participation of colonial Quaker women in poor relief. The Philadelphia Women’s Monthly Meeting mainly administered relief to its own members. Like their English counterparts in Swarthmore, the Philadelphia women were meticulous in documenting expenses, including their purposes. They gave, for example, small assistance for “clothing and nursing” to a woman and for “linen for the child placed with her by Friends” to another. The latter indicates that they were also entrusted with caring for young children and orphans, mostly by situating them in welcoming homes and assuming charges for their basic needs.<sup>14</sup> Other active women’s meetings include, but were not limited to, Radnor,

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<sup>10</sup> DWMM, p.7; Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, p.43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>14</sup> James, *People Among Peoples*, p.50.

Nantucket and Burlington.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note, however, that these women's meetings were not the sole administrators of poor relief. The dire conditions of the settlers and the lack of sufficient funds, even for Philadelphia women, required participation and assistance from the men.<sup>16</sup> As Fox had prescribed and similar to Swarthmore, women's meetings in the colonies turned to their male counterparts when they were not able to handle the situation.<sup>17</sup>

Other women's monthly meetings, such as Darby and Salem, did not partake in the poor relief at all. Darby, part of the Delaware County and even visited by William Penn himself, proves to be an interesting case study for the absence of women from charity. The Darby women's meeting had a stock and regular collections. It recorded in 1695 that the Yearly Meeting "ordered that a collection be gathered four times a year at the monthly meeting in the 3,6,9,12 month till further notice." The collection was to be disbursed as the meeting saw fit.<sup>18</sup> While the existence of a stock is evident, it is uncertain whether or not it was used for poor relief. The meeting did not record all of its expenses.<sup>19</sup> The few documented payments reveal that each quarter of the year, both meetings would appoint one or two Friends to attend the Quarterly

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<sup>15</sup> Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, p.45; James, *People Among Peoples*, p.51.

<sup>16</sup> James, *People Among Peoples*, p.51.

<sup>17</sup> For further information on the practices of men's participation in charity in colonial America, see James, *People Among Peoples* pp.44-59.

<sup>18</sup> DWMM, p.12.

<sup>19</sup> This is concluded from summing up collections and comparing the result with the amount that the account was "settled" by the meeting itself. For example, between March 1696 and June 1697, the total collection was £4 5s 3d. There were no recorded expenses, but the meeting concluded that it had £1 2s 8d in stock. The discrepancy of £3 2s 7d meant that the meeting failed to record many of its expenses. Darby Women's Monthly Meeting, 13-14.

Meetings and to carry with them contributions to its stock.<sup>20</sup> At other times the minutes would simply state that the collection was “all disbursed by the order of the same meeting,” without specifying what the disbursements were for.<sup>21</sup>

The absence of charity in the minutes of these women’s meetings raises two important questions: From what source did the Quakers of Darby receive aid? Why was there no evidence of poor relief in the minutes of some women’s meetings?

The answer to the first question is rather straightforward: Quakers in Darby received aid from the men’s monthly meeting. While it was concerned with marriages, burial grounds and settling disputes, the meeting recorded several instances of lending a helping hand to both male and female members of the community.<sup>22</sup> The men gathered two collections for the “relief” of Jeremiah Langley in 1696.<sup>23</sup> Three years later, the meeting ordered two Friends to “take care of the collections for a poor widow lately come over out of England.”<sup>24</sup>

The answer to the second question is more complex. It is evident that the Darby women failed to record many of their expenses. An explanation for the lack of charity, therefore, could simply be the lack of documentation. It is possible that the money that was unaccounted for in the stocks were used for the assistance of the poor, since the meeting was clearly instructed to do so by both epistles from London and the Yearly meeting.

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<sup>20</sup> DWMM, p.25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.93, 99.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.68-69.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

Another possible response derives from the social and economic aspects of the meeting. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the city of Philadelphia grew into one of the most important trading ports of the colonies. This growth was conducive to the wealth of Quakers, including women. The Philadelphia women had the largest stock out of all of the women's meetings, and were also more educated.<sup>25</sup> They benefited greatly from their surroundings and were able to use this advantage to aid the poor. Another women's meeting that had a large stock was Radnor, which even sent money to England for the relief of overseas prisoners.<sup>26</sup> The Nantucket women's meeting was active in poor relief for a different reason. Also due to their location, the men of Nantucket were often away on whaling trips, leaving the women in charge. These women, therefore, rose to the challenge and assumed responsibilities for the poor. Many strong and influential Quaker women came out of Nantucket.<sup>27</sup>

The Darby Women's Monthly Meeting's meager stock, relative to the men's, might have prevented it from partaking in charitable acts. The donations to Jeremiah Langley illustrate the difference between the stocks of the two meetings. The first donation was £2 15s 7.5d. The average collection of the women's meeting from 1696 to 1700 was 15s 6d, which was only a little over a quarter of the donation to Langley.<sup>28</sup> It was possible that the Darby women simply did not have enough funds to give to the poor. Costs of maintaining the meetinghouse and travel

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<sup>25</sup> James, *People Among Peoples*, p.339.

<sup>26</sup> Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, p.45.

<sup>27</sup> Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, p.46.

<sup>28</sup> This average was calculated by summing up total collections of the Darby Women's Monthly Meeting (£13p 19s) and dividing it with the number of times collections were made (23).

to Quarterly and Yearly Meetings were not recorded in the minute books. These expenses could easily explain the unaccounted funds from the stock and left the meeting with very little to do anything else. The presence of the men's meetings and their willingness to give also to women eradicated the pressure that was present in Nantucket. The setting and nature of men's meetings, therefore, played a major part in the women's participation in charity.

The evidence of the Darby men's administration of relief demonstrates that they had a similar approach to determining the recipients of aid and an analogous purpose in distributing charity. While the limited documentation on Langley engenders difficulty in constructing a profile, it also demonstrates what type of aid the men's meetings distributed. Langley's aid was most likely one given for a specific case; he did not receive monthly allowances from the meeting. His absence from the rest of the minutes suggests that he no longer needed assistance.<sup>29</sup> The other recipient of the men's meeting was a poor woman who had lost her husband. It was clear that needy widows would always be a part of the deserving poor and would always receive assistance.

While it is undeniably unusual for Quakers to have only male overseers of poor relief, the unique affairs of Darby reveal a certain quality of the Society of Friends. It is true that women's administration of charity was deeply rooted in their theology; however, it must also depend on particular circumstances and situations. If women were simply unable to see to the needs of the

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<sup>29</sup> While it might be possible that Langley may have moved, it was highly unlikely. Meetings needed to issue "certificates" for those who wanted to relocate. These certificates were to confirm that the individual was of good conduct. Meetings also had to review the certificates of those entering from other places; these evaluations were included in the minutes. As these were the only records of Langley in the minute book, there were no certificates issued for his relocation. (DMMM)



poor, the men would step in and assume responsibility. Practicality, which in other instances gave women's meetings the authority, also applied to men. Above all, Friends were highly practical and were able to adapt to meet challenges that they faced.

It may seem that seventeenth century Quaker women, excluded from business matters everywhere, were largely confined to religious affairs, particularly those associated with poor relief. Their central role in the church and charitable enterprise, however, was still radical. Their methods of aid distribution, particularly loans, were also innovative and distinctive from their parochial counterparts. These aspects of Quaker women's poor relief can alter the present understanding of the history of western charity. As early as in the seventeenth century, women were in control of aiding the poor, making important financial and administrative decisions, and devising unique schemes.

The English practices in American colonies demonstrate the extension of Quaker culture beyond the British Isles. This marks the beginning of Friends' internationalism, with charitable acts as one of its most important focuses and women at the forefront. The study of early modern Quaker women and poor relief enables our understanding of the global charitable and service operations that have become a hallmark of the Society of Friends until today.

### Notes on English money, date format and spelling

The English pound (£) is divided into 20 shillings (s), each shilling 12 pence (d).

Dates are given Old Style, but with the year taken to begin on 1 January rather than 25 March.

Spelling, capitalization and punctuation in early modern sources, except published titles, are modernized. The intention here is to make the sources easily comprehensible to modern readers. Proper names retain the spelling most consistently used in other sources (where a name might be spelled two or three different ways on the same page), except for surnames of some well-known individuals whose names are generally modernized.

### Notes on citation of the London Box Meeting account book

The account book takes the form of a standard account book, with entries on both sides. Entries on the debit side, involving disbursing aid and issuing loans will be accompanied with the letter “A” after the page number (eg. p.45A). Entries on the credit side, regarding donations and collections, will be indicated by the letter “B” (eg. p.45B).

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